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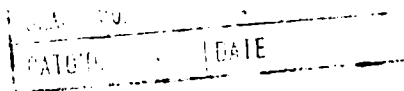
*Zionism and Arabism in Palestine and Israel*

# England and the Middle East

*The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire*  
1914–1921

Elie Kedourie

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**For S**

**Proverbs XXXI: 11-12**



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## Foreword

I WROTE this book while a Scholar of St. Antony's College, Oxford, and I am grateful to the Warden and Fellows for having given me the opportunity to do so, but I wish especially to thank the Warden, Mr F.W. Deakin, for his encouragement and for his kindness.

I am greatly obliged to Professor William Yale, to the Yale University Library, and to the National Central Archives, Washington, for the use of the Yale Papers, the interest and importance of which will be apparent to the reader. I would like also to thank Mr W.D. Hogarth for his help in connexion with D.G. Hogarth's papers, and the Librarian of the Foreign Office for allowing me to use an essay by D.G. Hogarth, and certain quotations from *The Arab Bulletin*, and from a memorandum by Miss G. Bell. The Librarian of New College, Oxford, allowed me access to the Milner Papers at New College, and Lady Milford to quote from Sir Arnold Wilson's Papers at the London Library: I thank them for their kindness.

Chapter 4 of the book has already substantially appeared in *The Cambridge Journal*.

In the transliteration of Arabic names, I have been sparing in the use of diacritical marks; I have used them only where they seemed to me absolutely essential.

*The London School of Economics and Political Science*  
July 1955

## *Abbreviations*

Y.P.I.	<i>Yale Papers</i> at the Yale University Library.
Y.P.II.	<i>Yale Papers</i> at the National Central Archives, Washington.
S.P.	<i>Seven Pillars of Wisdom</i> by T.E. Lawrence, 1940 edition.
<i>Documents I, IV</i>	<i>Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-39</i> , Series I, vol. IV, 1952.
<i>Loyalties</i>	<i>Loyalties, Mesopotamia</i> by A.T. Wilson, 2 vols., 1930-1.
<i>Review</i>	<i>Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia</i> , Cmd. 1061 (1920).

## Errata

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| p. 32, f. 1, line 2        | FOR Paleologue, <i>La Russie des Tsar spendantla Grande Guerre</i> READ Paléologue <i>La Russie des Tsars pendant la Grande Guerre</i> |
| p. 36, line 26             | FOR Aleppo READ Damascus   |
| p. 36, penultimate line    | OMIT from  |
| p. 42, f. 2, last line     | FOR The READ the   |
| p. 51, f. 1                | FOR Al-Manar READ 'Al-Manar'   |
| p. 58, line 20             | FOR (and Bin Saud concurred in this) 'that READ '(and Bin Saud concurred in this) that   |
| p. 59, f. 1, line 8        | FOR <i>Mudhakkati</i> READ <i>Mudhakkirati</i>   |
| p. 59, f. 1, line 9        | FOR <i>Arabya</i> READ <i>Arabiya</i> AND FOR <i>Iraqya</i> READ <i>Iraqiya</i>  |
| p. 63, f. 2, line 6        | FOR <i>al Jamyat al Arabyah</i> READ <i>al-Jam'iya al-Arabiya</i>  |
| p. 115, line 23            | FOR 'the importance READ the 'importance'  |
| p. 124, line 31            | FOR 'Algerians' READ "Algerians"   |
| p. 127, line 11            | FOR populace, <sup>3</sup> READ populace." <sup>3</sup>  |
| p. 130, line 16            | FOR states READ state  |
| p. 130, line 26            | FOR area READ area,  |
| p. 154, line 26            | FOR Arab-speaking READ Arabic-speaking   |
| p. 160-1, f. 2, line 10    | FOR French Army, <i>La</i> READ French Army'; <i>La</i>  |
| p. 161, line 27            | FOR Damascus READ Damascus   |
| p. 162, f. 2, line 2       | FOR <i>fur</i> READ <i>für</i>   |
| p. 166, line 30            | FOR others READ other  |
| p. 168, f. 2, line 2       | FOR Maryud READ Muraywid   |
| p. 170, f. 3, line 1       | FOR <i>Libnan</i> READ <i>Lubnan</i>   |
| p. 183, f. 3, line 2       | FOR <i>al'</i> READ <i>al</i>  |
| p. 190, line 16            | FOR Aghani READ Afghani  |
| p. 212, line 14            | FOR Goddess READ Muse  |
| p. 215, line 4 from bottom | FOR (1919) READ (1939)   |
| p. 217, line 2 from bottom | FOR <i>ba'duhn</i> READ <i>ba'duhu</i>   |
| p. 220, line 25            | FOR <i>fur</i> READ <i>für</i>   |

- p. 221, line 28                   FOR 1250–1900 READ *1250–1900*  
p. 222, lines 1–2               FOR (1875–1944) READ *(1875–1944)*

In the transliteration of some Arabic words, the sign of the hamza (') is consistently used throughout where the sign for the ayin (ʿ) is meant. The list of these words, in their correct transliteration, is as follows: 'Ahd, Sa'id, Sa'ud, Midfa'i, Dar'a, tasi', Sati', Ja'far, 'Izzat, Mas'ad, 'Ala', Isma'il, 'Iraq, 'iraqi, 'iraqiyya, 'ulama', 'Amara, Fir'aun, Shi'a, 'Askari, As'ad, nasi'a.

## Introduction

### I

The first edition of *England and the Middle East* was published in 1956, and reprinted in 1978. From the time when it first came out there have been references and allusions, both verbal and written, to the prepublication history of this book. The new edition provides an opportunity to set down the details of this history, which is of some interest, both in itself and for the light it sheds on the historiography of the modern Middle East in recent decades.

I wrote this book at St. Antony's College, Oxford which had elected me as a senior scholar in October 1951. As such, I was registered as a candidate for the D.Phil. degree and the typescript, which I had finished writing during the long vacation of 1953, was accordingly submitted to the University. In due course, the Board of the Faculty of Modern History appointed as examiners H.A.R. Gibb, Laudian Professor of Arabic in the University and James Joll, Fellow and Sub-Warden of St. Antony's. Thursday, 3 December, was set for the oral examination.

On the afternoon of the appointed day I went to the Examination Schools where the viva was to take place. My second visit to this building took place some three or four years ago when I gave a public lecture under the auspices of the Faculty of Modern History. On this latter occasion, my impression was of a dignified structure, by no means oppressive, with a neo-Gothic style in harmony with the architecture of many colleges in its neighbourhood. But on that December afternoon in 1953, perhaps because the neglect which it must have suffered during the war years had not yet been repaired, the building, seemingly deserted save for an elderly porter ensconced in one corner of the vast entrance hall, looked dingy and depressing. He introduced me into an equally dingy, dimly-lighted room where I was bidden to sit at a table facing my two examiners.

Joll I of course knew as a member of my college whom in the course of two years at St. Antony's I had had occasion to meet many times. Gibb I hardly knew, having met him only once or twice before, and that briefly. The impression I had carried from these fleeting encounters, for what it was worth, was of someone who was self-confident, masterful not to say imperious, and, I suspected, given to strong opinions and powerful emotions. From the start it became clear that Gibb would

take the principal part in my interrogation, and in fact his fellow-examiner proved to have little to say and remained mostly silent.

It soon became apparent that Gibb was much displeased with the work before him. But his disagreement with what I had written, though clearly vehement, was puzzling, not to say incoherent. The two years I had spent on *England and the Middle East* had, if nothing else, schooled me in the logic of historical narrative. In this logic, chronology and detail are of the essence; detail, again, had to fit in with detail and no one detail could stand on its own. The building up of details, on which narrative depends was, I had come to see, impossible unless there was evidence, and unless, moreover, one piece of evidence cohered with another; unless, further, inference followed inference without being, so to speak, forced. I had come, therefore, to believe that if an historical narrative was to be demolished, either the evidence on which it relied had to be discredited, or shown to admit of another—and better—interpretation, or else new evidence brought forward which could change the whole aspect of a question. Gibb, I was shocked to find, seemed little interested in the detail which made up my narrative, in its chronological sequence, or in the conclusions which had to follow if my evidence and inferences were trustworthy and correct. For instance, I thought I had established that there were very strong grounds for thinking that Damascus had not been actually conquered by the Sharifian forces at the beginning of October 1918, but rather that Allenby had forbidden his troops to enter the city after they had routed the Ottoman army. This was meant to enable the Sharif Faysal, commander of the so-called Northern Arab Army, to make a triumphant entry and claim the city as his trophy. If true, this was a discovery of some importance. But I was shocked to find that when, in the course of our exchanges, I tried to draw attention to the substantial and far-reaching consequences of Allenby's action, Gibb impatiently and angrily brushed all this aside. Angry indeed he was, his face all flushed, his tone exasperated. The candidate sitting before him was in no position, even if he had wanted, to retort in kind. But he did not want to. What remains with me from that afternoon long ago was the certainty which possessed me fairly early in the proceedings that argument with Gibb—I mean argument about evidence and inference, as this is understood among historians—was vain and useless. Another incident which I vividly recollect reinforced this conviction. Gibb had come armed with a copy of Philip Graves's biography of Sir Percy Cox who had played an important part in the affairs of Mesopotamia during and after the 1914 war. I was not unaware of its existence since it was referred to in my work. At one point, Gibb opened the book and quoted some statement of Cox's, meaning decisively to confound me. This made it obvious that my examiner had no idea of treating the record of Cox's doings and sayings simply as evidence, exactly on a par with other evidence, to be considered and critically weighed by the historian. For Gibb, Sir

Percy Cox was an authority, while for the historian, his *dramatis personae* can never be authorities, only exhibits.

After two hours or so of this fruitless palaver I was allowed to go. It was amply clear that my work had failed to find favour with the examiners, and I had now to consider how to proceed. I was in no doubt at all that it was out of the question to introduce the changes which they desired, and without which they would not recommend award of the degree. But the College had given me a scholarship for two years running, and had even paid my examination fees. I felt therefore under an obligation to do nothing without consulting the Warden, F.W. Deakin. I went to see him immediately following the oral and told him that I wanted to withdraw from the examination. I followed this with a letter on 5 December. I wrote:

I have been thinking about the thesis. I feel more and more inclined to the solution I suggested while talking to you on Thursday, that is to withdraw altogether. I will however do nothing before receiving your advice, but I want to say why this solution commends itself to me. Again and again during the oral examination, Professor Gibb kept on raising points on mere matters of opinion, and never once raised a question of scholarship, minute or substantial. The line which I understand he would like me to take, would be to make the "awakening" of the Oriental peoples, and the supposed influence of the "people" of this country on foreign questions justify the policy that was adopted then. These points were, of course, considered in my work, as far as the evidence at my disposal allowed; what I did was to indicate who, in fact, among those who carried out policy believed in this "awakening" and this alleged influence, and therefore conducted their policy in the light of this belief. More than this I cannot do. And to do more I consider irrelevant, beyond proof, a species of apologetics in which I cannot indulge. I recounted how things happened and buttressed my account with evidence which can be tested by the ordinary standards of historical criticism. Professor Gibb had either to demolish my evidence or to revise his opinions. He has done neither, but has used his opinions in order to by-pass my evidence and stay clear of any question of its credibility and worth. A particularly clear example of this lies in his assertion time and again, that the rising of 1920 in Mesopotamia was a "peasant revolt", that the Sharifians were wanted by the country, that without them the country could not have been governed. When you have a candidate who asserts the exact opposite, and who brings forward reasons for his assertions, you have first to show these reasons worthless, before you can proceed blandly with your original assertions. Professor Gibb has done nothing of the kind. Instead, he has appealed to the spirit of the times, and to the fact that we live in the twentieth and not in the nineteenth century in order to prove how wrong-headed I am. I write these

things not in order to complain, but to explain why I think a withdrawal is best. Professor Gibb has opinions about the Middle East. These opinions are well-known. It is in their light that he has judged my work. These opinions, which I am not prepared to share, relate not only to the Middle East but to fundamental political attitudes. I said during the examination that, from the point of view of the British in 1920, the Sharifians in Syria were carrying on sedition in Mesopotamia, and that sedition should not be rewarded. Professor Gibb's version of this is that the Sharifians in Syria had tasted power and therefore power had to be given to them in Mesopotamia. I hope you see where the disagreement lies. This is of course a genuine and legitimate disagreement, but not one which can serve as a ground for 'passing academic judgment on my work.

That same Thursday evening James Joll wrote me a long letter amplifying points made at the oral, and declaring his agreement with Gibb's criticisms. My reply of 13 December is useful in setting out fully the examiners' objections and my reaction to them:

I have considered very carefully the comments on my work you so kindly sent me after the oral examination. I have one general remark to make at the outset which applies to them and to those of Professor Gibb. I have written an historical narrative of particular events, an elucidation of specific causes and detailed effects, of particular acts and their visible consequences. Any valid criticism of my work therefore must show that a particular cause which I claim to be efficient was inefficient or inexistent, or that a particular effect which I claim follows from a certain cause does not, in fact, follow, or can be shown, logically, not to follow. This kind of criticism has not been forthcoming. Instead, you have asked me to add to the causes of the events which I describe, two general causes, which you say must have exercised an influence over all events, namely, the general ideas of 1918, and "the crisis in British imperial thinking". Before I can accept these causes as valid and efficient, I must test them by the criterion I have proposed. I must ask, does any event with which I am concerned, remain unexplained, or any decision mysterious, if I do not appeal to your two general causes? I must answer in the negative; and unless you show me how any event, or series of events absolutely requires the explanations you propose, I must decline them as unnecessary. If I were to write about the ideas of Smuts, Wilson, Cecil and the crisis in British imperial thinking at large without relating them to the events I describe—and I do not see how they can be related—I would be open to the imputation of being a doctrinaire seeking excuses and apologies, and of making nebulous general ideas take the place of the



vital play and counterplay of the wills of men who have power and who can sway the destinies of other men. I am not inclined to write a Whig interpretation of 1919; and this is, in essence, what I am required to do. You say you agree with Professor Gibb's criticisms. Professor Gibb, if you will recall, asked me at the oral, what else the British Government could do when confronted with the pressure of public opinion and the awakening of the Oriental peoples overseas. Can this pressure and this awakening be proved? The answer must depend on detailed evidence, which must either exist or not exist. Since you do not indicate what the evidence is, since I have not found it in my researches, and since you do not say that I have overlooked any particular evidence, I must assume that it does not exist. If the answer is, on the other hand, not dependent on evidence, then it becomes speculation, where any man's opinion is as good as another's. I have eschewed such speculations. You have been pressing me to pursue them. Take Allenby's attitude to the Syrian question. In my work, I reported his alarmist despatches on the potentialities of the Sharifians for mischief, I described the forces at his disposal and those of the Sharifians; all these things are matters of evidence. I set out the evidence and refrained from comment. Professor Gibb seized on this and proceeded to instruct me in all the anxieties which must have pressed on Allenby's mind: the riots in Jaffa, the demonstrations in Egypt, the sedition of India, the low morale of the British troops at the time—what else, Professor Gibb asked could Allenby do but be alarmed at the Sharifian threat of trouble? But how does he know that these things were on Allenby's mind? Has he any evidence? None. It is pure speculation, which anyone who may like will call apologetics and white-washing. I am asked to emulate such proceedings. I do not feel inclined to do so. Had you shown that I am mistaken in my description of British policies, or of the events connected therewith, I would have bowed to your criticism; had you explained in what way the ideas of Smuts resulted in the installation of Faisal in Damascus, or the crisis in British imperial thinking in his installation in Baghdad, I would have gladly accepted your explanation: and it is only criticisms and explanations of this order that I can accept. The rest is speculation. Further, it is not true that I am concerned only with the actions of British officials in the Middle East, and not with the decisions of the British Government in London. Indeed I am concerned with little else: the whole work is an attempt at their elucidation, decision by decision, and step by step. If you will show me in detail how the elucidation fails I can try to do better; general opinions and blanket explanations are neither here nor there, and I cannot take notice of them. It is true that it was I who submitted my work to official academic judgment, and I must accept the consequences of my actions. Here, fortunately, I can choose between different consequences. You will I am sure

appreciate that my choice will tend towards what will do least damage and least violence to my work.

The exchanges at the oral, and James Joll's letter, gave me a fairly full idea of my examiners' objections, and what I had to do in order to meet them. Though I had no intention of doing so, I still thought it important to obtain, for the record so to speak, an official statement of these objections. I therefore applied to the Secretary of Faculties at Oxford for a statement which would carry the authority of the Board of the Faculty of Modern History. The Secretary declined to do so, referring me instead to my supervisor, J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, also a Fellow of St. Antony's. After the examination, Wheeler-Bennett had not sought to communicate with his student, and I myself had failed in my attempts to reach him. I now had to trouble him with a letter. It took until 21 February 1954 for him to reply. His letter added nothing to what I had gathered from the oral and James Joll's letter. He did say, however, that he fully agreed with the examiners that the changes they required were necessary. Wheeler-Bennett had read my work before it was submitted to the University, but had at the time neither objected to any of it, nor demurred from its conclusions. I wrote to him on 25 February:

I only wrote on the recommendation of the Secretary of Faculties, in reply to my request to be supplied with an authoritative statement of the views of the examiners. This you have now given me and I am very grateful to you. My short answer to the examiners is that they have no evidence with which to support their contention that the events which I describe were caused, influenced, or made inevitable by a) "public opinion", b) events in India and Egypt, or c) General Smuts's ideas. The kind of history I have written depends on detailed evidence being brought to bear on specific matters. The only criticism I can accept must either demolish my evidence or my use of it, or bring forward other evidence conflicting with mine. This the examiners have not done. When I said that things happened in such and such a manner, the examiners did not counter by saying, No they happened otherwise; they only exclaimed Oh but what happened was inevitable as public opinion was for it. This is quite irrelevant to my purpose and in any case can neither be proved nor disproved. Further, the argument from "public opinion" is dubious, historically: it is an argument which only seeks to justify to excuse and to extenuate, it is a solvent of political and moral responsibility and should be, as such, the last argument which an historian may allow himself either to use or to advocate. To my detailed and patient reconstruction of incidents, events and policies then, the examiners have opposed nebulous speculations at large and have pretended, by virtue only of their academic position to enforce their opinions on me. I was unwise enough to

put myself in a position where such opinions could be enforced against me. I must now extricate myself as best I can.

On the same day I wrote to the Secretary of Faculties:

I have, as you recommended, written to my supervisor and I now have his answer. Kindly inform the Board that the contentions of the examiners appointed by them are at variance with the conclusions—buttressed by evidence—presented in my thesis. Since the examiners have neither demolished my evidence, nor provided evidence in support of their contentions, I must regard these as mere speculative opinions, and cannot take notice of them. I desire therefore to withdraw my work from the scrutiny of the examiners appointed by the Board.

The Secretary of Faculties must have been somewhat bemused by my letter, for he wrote again, on 1 March, asking whether he was really to understand that I did not wish to accept the Board's offer to re-submit my thesis. I replied on 7 March:

I am sorry that my letter of February 25 was not as clear as it was meant to be. In view of the observations of the examiners at the oral examination and those they made through my supervisor, I do not care further to expose my work to their opinions. I trust this answers your question, and I request that you kindly communicate this letter as well as my letter of February 25 to the Board.

My complete lack of concern over the D.Phil. may now surprise. But one of the great strengths of the university education I received had been to inculcate in me the conviction that a good first degree was as good an indication of intelligence and ability as any, and that a doctorate was really a piece of supererogation. It was thus a relief when the Warden of St. Antony's very nicely released me from any obligation I might have to the College, and gave me full liberty to proceed as I thought best. I had now to see whether the work could at all be published. I was, after all, an unknown author, one moreover whose work had failed to satisfy established and eminent authorities. The previous October I had been appointed an assistant lecturer in the Department of Government at the London School of Economics. The head of the Department was Professor Michael Oakeshott. He knew of course that I was presenting a thesis at Oxford. After the examination I naturally told him what transpired, said that I wanted to see the work published and asked his advice. Michael Oakeshott was a director of Bowes and Bowes, a small publisher with a distinguished list of authors and titles. After he had read *England and the Middle East* he suggested proposing its publication to his fellow-directors. I was very grateful to accept, and the thesis was published as it stood, in April 1956.

## II

As I have said, Gibb's way with historical argument and its requirements I found shocking. What however puzzled me was the intense anger which my work provoked in him. He clearly objected to it, and clearly thought his objections well-founded but, all the same, why the anger? In my letter to the Warden I had written that Gibb's opinions about the Middle East were 'well-known'. I no longer recall, at this distance in time, what exactly I then knew about Gibb's opinions on the modern Middle East. It cannot have extended beyond such gossip as one heard in London and Oxford and the occasional article or book review published in *International Affairs*, the Chatham House organ, and similar publications. It was only later, in the decade preceding the publication of *The Chatham House Version* (which came out in 1970), when I was systematically searching out and reading the writings of Arnold J. Toynbee and his associates, and later still, when Gibb's memoranda, prepared for the Foreign Office during the second world war, became publicly available, that the character of his political judgement, was fully brought home to me, and his behaviour on that December afternoon in 1953 became somewhat explicable.

A reading of this material leaves one in no doubt that Gibb harboured strong feelings about contemporary events in the Middle East, and a deep conviction of the guilt of his country in its Middle-Eastern, and more generally, its imperial policy. His tone throughout is categorical and strident; no hint of a doubt or a qualification appears. Only someone who was fully and minutely acquainted with the record, and had pondered it deeply, could have the right to hand down such draconian verdicts. It was however manifest that Gibb was not, and could not be acquainted with the detail of diplomatic and political transactions. The detail was to a large extent unavailable to the public when Gibb was writing his fiery denunciations. And, to the extent that it was available, there is no evidence that he had had any critical engagement with it. This did not prevent him from confidently pronouncing about the actions of Great Britain and the United States in the Middle East. But such pronouncements, however fervent and well-intentioned, had no value as historical judgements. To take an example: in *The Spectator* of 25 November 1938, Gibb reviewed George Antonius's *Arab Awakening*. The book, as is well-known, is a tissue of doubtful historical statements, marshalled to form an apologia for the cause of Arab nationalism. It was a very able, very clever, production, the qualities of which entitled it to a critical scrutiny. The readers of *The Spectator* were offered nothing of the kind. Gibb simply took for granted that Antonius was telling a true story, one which aroused his indignation—to which he freely gave expression. He agreed with Antonius that the 'all-pervading Zionist propaganda' had 'virtual control of public opinion in Britain and the West'. 'What is much worse, however, and genuinely perplexing', he went on,

is that a Government which professes the principles of democracy should deceive, and keep on deceiving, its people, firstly by concealing its imperial objects behind a mask of idealism, and subsequently by refusing to disclose both its original commitments to the Arabs and the fact that it has been forced in consequence into a policy which is abhorrent to the traditions of its people and furnishes ammunition to its enemies.

Every single one of these assertions is either historically baseless or question-begging or else leaves history behind for the rhetoric of political advocacy. Another example may be cited: in a piece published in 1951, there is a stark contrast set up between Eastern virtue and Western depravity. 'To regard Gandhi's denunciation of the "satanic civilization" of the West', Gibb affirmed

as if it were a mere foible or parenthesis or journalistic exaggeration is a typical piece of Western self-satisfaction and protective delusion. It is the most solemn warning that has yet come out of Asia.

In a remarkable passage of self-incrimination which followed, Gibb was again sweeping and categorical:

There is [he laid down] no Eastern nation today that does not denounce, with justified if self-righteous horror, the inhumanity and 'genocide' not only of Germans and Russians but also of Britons and Americans even if under the stress of war. . . . At every level, the contrast between the humanitarian ideals proclaimed by the West and its disregard of humanitarian values in action had produced a profound disbelief in the whole system of Western public and private morality.<sup>1</sup>

Genocide? Britons and Americans? Moral judgement has to be a cool, delicate and discriminating exercise. But the judgement which this passage discloses is heated, gross and indiscriminating.

The papers in the Public Record Office illustrate Gibb's political, rather than moral, judgement. When war broke out in 1939, Gibb became a member of the Foreign Research and Press Service, set up by Chatham House in order to assist the Foreign Office, and presided over by Toynbee. As such, he produced papers and memoranda for the Department on Middle Eastern issues. In these papers he fervently espoused the project of an Arab federation as the cure for all Middle Eastern ills. Western promotion of an Arab federation would, he wrote in a paper

<sup>1</sup> 'Near East Perspective: The Present and the Future', in T. Cuyler Young, ed., *Near Eastern Culture and Society*, Princeton, 1951, pp. 231 and 233.

of December 1942, still the suspicion of British motives 'by tangible evidences of sincerity and goodwill'. Federation was urgent, he wrote in another paper of November 1943, because otherwise Pan-Arabism, which he described as a violently populist Mahdist movement, would irresistibly sweep the board. Moreover Arab federation is natural, while separatist tendencies in Arab Nationalism are 'not inherent forces', but for the most part 'the accidental consequences of a forced separation'. For Western statesmen to encourage separatism is 'a policy of bankruptcy' which could only fan the flames of Pan-Arabism. Gibb therefore proposed breaking up existing political structures and setting up 'a close federation to be built up of provinces, viz Basra, Baghdad, Mosul, Jazira, Aleppo, Damascus, Latakia, Lebanon, Jebel ad-Druze, Palestine, Transjordan, and the Syrian Desert (possibly divided into a northern and a southern province)'. All these provinces would be more or less equal and relatively homogeneous, and had developed the habit of cooperation 'over a period of many centuries'. In this federation there would be a variety of emirates, republics, councils of Shaikhs, all 'without interfering with the supremacy of the elective principle'. The Federation, 'elastic' and capable of gradual extension, 'would hold out to all patriotic Arabs the prospect of the ultimate peaceful union of the whole of Arab Asia'.<sup>2</sup>

The last word on these absurd and visionary projects can be left to the Foreign Secretary. In a despatch to the British Minister at Jedda of 15 August 1941, which, as it happens, is filed in the vicinity of yet another pro-Federation paper from Gibb, Eden reported a conversation with the Saudi Arabian Minister in London in which he told Sheikh Hafiz Wahba: 'Since the days of Muhammad no one had been able to arrive at a satisfactory scheme for Arab federation'.<sup>3</sup> What both his published and unpublished writings disclose, at any rate, is that Gibb was politically committed: he had strong sympathies and equally strong views about the right policies for the Middle East. In itself, this was not objectionable, but the political commitment fatally spilled over into, and encouraged, academic tendentiousness, which is a species of *trahison des clercs*. Given that Sir Hamilton Gibb's great power and influence in the academic world on both sides of the Atlantic, extended far beyond the field of Islam and Arabic language and literature in which he was knowledgeable, the consequences were clearly lasting and substantial.

<sup>2</sup>F.O. 371/31338, 7433/49, and F.O. 371/39988, 2768/41.

<sup>3</sup>F.O. 371/27044, 4761/53. A paper by Gibb on Arab federation of 9 June 1941 is in the same file, 3824/53. Crown Copyright Records quoted by permission of the Controller, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

## III

*England and the Middle East* is a work of history. It is, in other words, of necessity backward-looking, and offers no recipes or recommendations for future policy. But the picture of what took place in the Levant and Mesopotamia during and immediately after the 1914 war, as the record disclosed it, was such as to arouse the worst forebodings. British policy, with which I was mostly concerned, seemed to me based on shaky, if not wholly mistaken, assumptions, while its executants were, with few exceptions, lost in illusions or else committed to this or that Middle-Eastern cause, in fact much like my own committed examiner. If one wanted to go forward from 1921—where my narrative stopped—one could hardly help being pessimistic about a region the political arrangements of which were so ramshackle, the political and social institutions so weak, so exposed to the violence of ideological adventures, and of the voracious cupidities of political and military figures whom there was little to restrain. Re-reading the book thirty years after its publication, thirty years of blood, treachery and despotic rule, its foreshadowings and forbodings do not seem out of place or even exaggerated. Yet in 1956 it was possible for a reviewer to query this view of the Middle East:

Throughout the book [wrote Albert Hourani] there are dark hints that the chaos to which British policy was bound to lead has in fact come about, and in particular that the establishment of independent Arab states handed over religious and racial minorities to 'the lust for power of discontented and ambitious men'. But judged by the standards of an imperfect world, the Arab states have not done so badly in dealing with one of the most difficult of political problems. In Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan religious peace may be precarious, but it exists.<sup>4</sup>

Would that Hourani had been right. The Middle East would have been spared much heart-break and much spilt blood, it would not have been the wilderness of tigers it now manifestly is.

For myself I was always sceptical of such visions. As I put it in an article published in *The Cambridge Journal* in 1952 which considered the fate of Armenians and other so-called minorities in the Middle East, 'persecutors and persecuted, hunters and hunted are in the grip of the powers of darkness'.<sup>5</sup> This article, and one of the previous year on the British and the French in the Levant during the second world war, also in *The Cambridge Journal*, appeared under the pseudonym, Antiochus. The Antiochus I meant was the unfortunate hero of Racine's play

<sup>4</sup>*International Affairs*, October 1956, p. 512.

<sup>5</sup>The article is now included in *The Chatham House Version*, 1970. The quotation is at p. 315.

*Bérénice* who utters the famous line, all desolate magnificence: *Dans l'orient désert quel devint mon ennui*. It was the melancholy with which this line is instinct which led me to choose this particular pseudonym, in order to hint at the feelings which the ruinous condition of the modern Middle East inspired in one. Famous lines from an English poet I would also often in those years quote to myself, those sombre concluding lines from 'Dover Beach' in which Matthew Arnold lamented that

we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

It was then, about 1952, that I acquired a recording of 'Dover Beach' sung by the baritone John Langstaff to a setting by Samuel Barber. I first met Maurice Cowling a few months after the publication of *England and the Middle East*. What he wrote many years later confirms that I am not mistaken in the description of my then state of mind. As he recalled in 1980, my conviction at the time, derived from what had been done in the Middle East, was that 'English government was conducted in so innocent a fashion that a day of reckoning was unavoidable'.<sup>6</sup>

#### IV

*England and the Middle East* is, as has been said, a work of history. As such, it depends upon evidence. The evidence I had at my disposal when I was writing was much more scanty than what became available from the mid-nineteen sixties onwards, when students were able to consult the papers relating to the first world war and its aftermath at the Public Record Office in London, and elsewhere. Had these sources been at my disposal in 1951-53 *England and the Middle East* would obviously have been a different, and most probably a longer work: in historical narrative detail is of the essence, and the detail to hand fifteen years after its completion was much more copious. Also, matters which I had been compelled to leave unexamined, because lack of sufficient detail left them in obscurity, would have been discussed with some confidence. But if the book would have been longer and more detailed, it does not follow that its structure, as it now stands, or its conclusions, would have been destroyed. Over the decades since its publication, as opportunity offered, or freedom from teaching and other commitments allowed, in one way or another I examined the new material extensively and published an appreciable number of works to supplement the account I had offered in the thesis

<sup>6</sup>Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*, Cambridge, 1980, p. xxii.



of 1953, and clarified some of the then unavoidable obscurities. To supplement and clarify happily by no means meant to supersede. It is useful and convenient to set out here these other writings: 'Cairo and Khartoum on the Arab Question, 1915-1918', 'The Capture of Damascus, 1 October 1918', 'The Kingdom of Iraq: A Restrospect', all included in *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle-Eastern Studies*, 1970; 'Sir Mark Sykes and Palestine, 1915-16' in *Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies*, 1974; 'Colonel Lawrence and his Biographers' and 'The Surrender of Medina, January 1919', both in *Islam in the Modern World and Other Studies*, 1980; and 'The Iraqi Shi'is and their Fate', in Martin Kramer, ed., *Shi'ism, Resistance and Revolution*, 1987. To these shorter studies one has to add a whole book devoted to one central issue which figures in *England and the Middle East*, and the size of which (330 pages) gives an idea of the much lengthier treatment which the availability of the new material makes both necessary and possible. The book in question is *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and its Interpretations* which appeared in 1976. The relation of this book to *England and the Middle East*, and how the later work grew out of the earlier is examined in an essay, 'In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: Genesis of a History' first published in 1979 and included in *Islam in the Modern World*.

All in all, here then was quite a large body of new evidence with which to confront my earlier conclusions. It was therefore gratifying to the author that somehow or another he had been able to make such good use of the exiguous material he was able to put together in the early fifties, that it had yielded results which stood up well to the subsequent test, and that he had dug for himself no pits out of which he would have had painfully and shamefacedly to clamber. One essay, that on the capture of Damascus, which first appeared in 1964 in the inaugural number of *Middle Eastern Studies*, gave the kind of pleasure which comes from fitting the last pieces of a jigsaw. With the help of new evidence, the essay incontrovertibly established the conclusion which in *England and the Middle East* had rested on evidence which, though strong, was circumstantial. This was that Allenby had deliberately abandoned Damascus to Faisal and his men—a contention which Gibb, as has been seen, had impatiently, dismissively and inexplicably brushed aside.

I would like now to draw attention to the writings of two authors which throw new light on issues, important in themselves, which, however, figure only briefly in *England and the Middle East*. The first relates to the beginnings of the Eastern Question. On the first page of Chapter I, discussing these beginnings, I wrote that the policy of George Canning, the Foreign Secretary, towards the insurrection in Greece was dictated not so much by a clear-cut attitude towards the Ottoman Empire itself, as by a preoccupation with the European balance of power, and that 'perhaps only by forgetting the existence of the Ottoman Empire and remembering that of Austria that George Canning's policy can be understood'. In a monograph,

*The Lion and the Phoenix: British Policy Towards the 'Greek Question' 1821-1832* (appearing in Volume 24 of *Middle Eastern Studies*) Steven Schwartzberg questions whether such a judgement (which derives from the work of H.W.V. Temperley and other historians) can be sustained. By a detailed scrutiny of the evidence, Schwartzberg shows that Canning was not moved primarily by balance-of-power considerations, but by an ideological *parti-pris* in favour of Greek nationalism, a *parti-pris* incompatible with the maintenance of the European balance, and indeed ultimately with the existence of a stable society of states. Schwartzberg argues that Canning's philhellenism was an abiding element in his attitude to the Ottoman Empire, and that some verses on the fallen state of Greece which he wrote while a schoolboy at Eton do express the sympathies and leanings of the statesman:

This was thy state! but oh! how chang'd thy fame,  
And all thy glories fading into shame.  
What? that thy bold, thy freedom-breathing land  
Should crouch beneath a tyrant's stern command!

If Schwartzberg is right—and his argument is clear and cogent—then Canning must rank as a precursor of those British statesmen and officials dealing with the Middle East from 1914 onwards in whom the ideological impulse or temptation proved so strong, and so far-reaching in its consequences.

Schwartzberg also quotes a letter of 1826 by Metternich criticizing Canning's policy of mediating between the Ottoman Empire and its rebellious Greek-speaking subjects—a letter the contemporary relevance of which will be immediately apparent:

What [wrote Metternich] would be the fate of Europe—that of civilization if the doctrine of the *dédoublement des Etats* were ever admitted by the last supporters of the peace of nations? How can a man of sense advance so subversive a contention, or at least permit himself the attempt to advance it? Is England then ready to regard as a Power equal in rights to that of the King the first Irish Club which declares itself the *Insurgent Government of Ireland*? To regard as *fondée dans son droit* the French Power which would accept the office of mediator by reason of the sole fact that the invitation had been addressed to it by the *Irish Government*. . . . Whither does this absurdity not lead us?

The second issue relates to the Baghdadi secret society, *Haras al-istiqlal* (the Guardians of Independence) which I describe (p. 191) as Shi'ite. Abd al-Razzaq Abid al-Daraji published in 1978 in Baghdad a valuable biography of the Shi'ite political figure Ja'far abu' l-Timman (*Ja'far abu' l-Timman wa dawruhu fi'l-haraka al wataniyya fi'l-Iraq*), in which he discusses at some length the history of the *Haras*

(pp. 75–85). Daraji has had access to some unpublished memoirs by Ali al-Bazirgan who, like abu'l-Timman, played a part in preparing for the anti-British insurrection of 1920. From the evidence disclosed by the memoirs, it appears that the *Haras* society was not, in its beginnings at any rate, a Shi'ite association. Rather, it comprised both Shi'ites and Sunnis from Baghdad, both touched by Western ideas and moved by the ideal of an Arab nationalism which would transcend sectarian differences. Later on, however, with the increasing involvement of Shi'ite religious figures, tribal leaders and landowners of the Middle Euphrates in the anti-British movement, the *Haras* took on an increasingly Shi'ite orientation. Two of its Shi'ite members, Muhammad Baqir al-Shabibi and abu'l-Timman were eventually despatched to maintain liaison with the leaders in the Middle Euphrates. With the defeat of the insurrection by the British the *Haras* became of no consequence. The hope of the Baghdadi Shi'ite intellectuals, betokened by their membership of the *Haras*, of a new political order which would transcend sectarian divisions, thus ended in bitter defeat. The Kingdom of Iraq, with its overwhelming Sunni predominance, was erected upon this defeat. The fact, then, that the *Haras* was in its origins a Sunni-Shi'ite group rather than a purely Shi'ite one poignantly brings out the fragility of the expectations entertained by those who worked for an independent Iraq and points up their grievous disappointment.

There remains to say a word about the terms, England and English, which figure both in the title and the body of the work. On its publication in 1956 this usage attracted the approval of one reviewer, Christopher Sykes, who declared 'enjoyable' my 'aversion to the idiotic term "British"'. But another reviewer, John Connell, denying that he was 'touchily Scotch about this', sternly pointed out that 'it is a usage as incorrect as it is familiar outside this country'. In using these terms, however, it was far from my thoughts either to praise the Englishry which Sykes declared to be a lost cause, or to cause offence to the Scots. One of my reasons is hinted at by Connell who points out that the usage is familiar outside this country. In using the words, England and English, I did in fact seek to recall something of the flavour and the style of diplomacy and international relations in a period when so many of those who dealt with Britain and the British Empire or who lived in its shadow persisted in calling them England and English. There was another reason. One of the first books I read when I began to study the Eastern Question and to learn how to do diplomatic history was H.W.V. Temperley's *England and the Near East* for which I came to have great admiration. The title of my own book was thus also meant to be a token of this admiration. But to have made this explicit might, I thought, have smacked of presumption.



## CHAPTER I

### *The Bases of English Policy in the Middle East, 1830-1914*

THE policy of one country towards another is, at best, a poor make-shift thing. It is conceived in the heat and urgency of pressing affairs and, from the nature of the case, must be grounded upon ignorance, irrelevance and misunderstanding. Directed as it is to the attainment of advantage and the securing of interest, policy is heedless of things as they are, provided the advantage is attained and the interest secured. And yet a policy which survives through the years, which generations of statesmen and diplomats practise and modify, gradually begins to live and to fascinate; little by little it takes on the aspect of a dogma, and becomes independent of the purposes for which it was first devised, ruling the thoughts and actions of men, giving rise to hot metaphysical disputes in which temperament clashes with temperament, and belief with belief. So it is with English policy in the Middle East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

#### I

An Ottoman policy became necessary for England as soon as she found herself, in the eighteenth century, acquiring Eastern dependencies. But it is not until the 1830s, when Mehmet Ali invaded Syria, that we find such a policy taking shape. When England was fighting Napoleon her policy in the Middle East had, perforce, to be adapted to the exigencies of the war. Later, on the one occasion when the Ottoman question held the attention of English statesmen, during the Greek Revolution, the policy adopted by them towards the Ottoman Empire was dictated not so much by considerations of English interests in Asia, or by a clear-cut attitude towards the Ottoman Empire itself, as by a preoccupation with the European balance of power, and with the necessity of maintaining it. The Ottoman policies of George Canning, and of his cousin Stratford Canning, who was Ambassador at Constantinople from 1826 to 1832, make sense only if they are seen to derive from European preoccupation and anxieties. The fate of the Ottoman Empire was not the prime consideration, and it is perhaps only by forgetting the existence of the Ottoman Empire and

remembering that of Austria that George Canning's policy can be understood. It is only later, when he returned to Constantinople in 1842, that Stratford Canning initiated the policy for which he is now known; for it must be remembered that his policy was not the same before and after 1842. He himself must have been aware that his later views could not be reconciled with his earlier ones, for during his retirement, he attempted, somewhat lamely, to explain his Greek policy according to Ottoman principles: 'The events which accompanied the Hellenic war of independence, though often in appearance and effect hostile to Turkey,' he wrote, 'were certainly not so in spirit on the part of England. . . . Our intervention, though friendly to the Greeks, was yet more friendly to the Turks, inasmuch as it was directed to a pacification calculated to limit sacrifices on their part, which could not be entirely avoided.'<sup>1</sup> The explanation is as ingenious as the fact that he had to give it is interesting.

It was really Palmerston and Ponsonby who had to make a definite decision when they were faced with Russian and French designs on the Ottoman Empire in the 1830s. Their decision was that such designs were not to be tolerated. This was the beginning of the doctrine of the 'independence and integrity' of the Ottoman Empire which was to remain, until 1914, the most cogent and most durable doctrine about the Middle East that Europe has known in modern times.

The doctrine was, of course, meant by Palmerston to safeguard the position of England in the Mediterranean and her communications with India, and to provide her with a convenient defence against Russian and French ambitions. It had another important virtue. It removed easily and conveniently one great cause of contention between the European Powers:—namely, the inheritance of the Ottoman domains and the possession of Constantinople. This virtue continued to reconcile English Foreign Secretaries to the doctrine, even when they were persuaded that it was much better for the Ottoman Empire to disappear, or even when they could reach an understanding with France and Russia. Thus, in 1867, the Austrian Ambassador in London reported that Lord Stanley 'professes neither sympathy nor special interest for the Turks. If they disappeared from Europe he would not be inconsolable. The difficulty is to *know whom to put in their place*.'<sup>2</sup> And as late as 1913, Sir Edward Grey categorically reiterated the same doctrine and wished to apply it to what remained of the Ottoman Empire: '... the only policy,' he said, 'to which

<sup>1</sup> Stratford de Redcliffe, *The Eastern Question*, 1881, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Temperley, 'British Policy towards . . . Turkey, 1830-1914,' in *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 1933, p. 166.

we can become a party is one directed to avoid collapse and partition of Asiatic Turkey . . .<sup>1</sup> for another policy would once again bring into question the possession of Constantinople, and probably result in a European war.<sup>2</sup>

But to avoid the collapse and partition of the Ottoman Empire raised a grave difficulty, a difficulty that went indeed to the heart of the matter. For the whole trouble arose out of the inability of the Ottoman state to defend itself against the might that Europe had obtained from its science and industry. The Ottoman Empire was to remain inviolate, and yet the Ottoman Empire was not able to defend itself. The paradox had to be faced and the dilemma somehow resolved.

The dilemma looked, at first sight, difficult but not insoluble. What the Ottoman Government had to do was to adopt the very techniques that gave Europe its superiority in arms. This is what Palmerston and Ponsonby urged on Sultan Mahmoud who lent a willing ear, for he himself had been long convinced of the necessity of following this very course. But an army on the European model cannot exist in a state otherwise untouched by European influences; conscription, regular formations, an efficient commissariat, all these desirable innovations required a bureaucracy equally modelled on the European example, centralised and working to rule. And how could this object be reached, if the Empire was cut up into provinces ruled by semi-feudal lords, content to send yearly tribute to Constantinople and to raise armed contingents in emergencies, and into autonomous religious communities organised separately each from the other? The steps of this logic must lead to one conclusion: if the independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire were to be preserved, it must begin immediately to reform on European lines. This was the conviction of Stratford Canning as he came to Constantinople in 1842 to enter on his second Ambassadorship, fortified by his 'instruction' from Aberdeen to 'impart stability to the Sultan's government by promoting judicious and well-considered reforms.'<sup>3</sup>

Stratford Canning's conviction was the development of an attitude which he had taken up when, a young undergraduate from Cambridge, he first came to Constantinople in 1808 to act as secretary to Adair's mission. From this attitude he was not, during all his life, to deviate at all. He had barely spent six months at Constantinople when he was writing to George Canning, in April 1809: 'Destruction will not come upon this

<sup>1</sup> Gooch and Temperley, *British Documents on the Origin of the War*, vol. X, part I, p. 481. Grey to Buchanan, July 4, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 450. Minute by Sir Louis Mallet, June 12, 1913.

<sup>3</sup> S. Lane-Poole, *Life of Stratford Canning*, 1888, vol. II, p. 79.

empire either *from the north or from the south*; it is rotten at the heart; the seat of corruption is in the government itself.<sup>1</sup> This was a natural conclusion to which a young man of his time and upbringing would come. After all, it was not such a long time ago that the Ottoman Empire was the constant and overbearing foe of Christendom, when, in proud isolation, it spurned the ungodly ways of the Frankish unbelievers. A young man proud of his country and convinced of the truth of his religion would not be disposed to look for excellencies in the Ottoman Empire. Its ways could not be his ways, the professions and conduct of its public men were not those which he had been brought up to regard as admirable, and the operations of its government could not but be strange and incomprehensible to him. Stratford Canning was not one distinguished for his humility, and faced with the spectacle of Ottoman government he would certainly say that it was a government of and for stiff-necked, foolish and ignorant heathen. The wonder would have been had he thought otherwise. His biographer is surely justified in saying that Canning never was a Turcophil and that he 'would have welcomed the formation of a Christian empire in the place of Turkey if he could have discovered any Eastern Christians fit to rule it.'<sup>2</sup> For him, the Turk was always the unspeakable Turk, and his government automatically misgovernment. This had been his belief at the beginning of his career, and so it remained to the end. Any affection that he came to have for the Ottomans was perhaps akin to that of the missionary for the refractory and back-sliding savages to whose improvement he had dedicated a lifetime. In 1876 he was moved to write to *The Times* about the Bosnian crisis and these were then his views: 'The Servians themselves may be deficient in civilisation as affecting the principles or practice of governments and the imperative duties of humanity; but their defects of administration are softened by the profession of Christianity, and their occasional excesses are more the acts of individual impulse than the consequence of an established system . . . the very idea of reinstating any amount of Turkish misgovernment in places once cleared of it is simply revolting.'<sup>3</sup> His sympathies, it is clear, were not with the Ottoman Empire as it was constituted; he disliked this constitution radically and cordially; he would have willingly seen the Ottoman state and the principle of Muslim supremacy on which it was built disappear completely; and he had been glad to contribute to this end in his Greek policy of 1826. Such a policy could, however, be no longer safely continued; the 'independence and integrity' of the Ottoman Empire had

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Lane-Poole, vol. II, p. 462.

<sup>3</sup> Stratford de Redcliffe, p. 25.



to be preserved. Given his views about the Empire, there was only one way in which to achieve this result. It was that Turkey should apprentice herself to Europe.

He did not underestimate the difficulty of the undertaking; resolution, perseverance, time and money were all needful, and all of them scarce; but even they would be useless unless the example of Europe were heeded: 'knowledge must flow into this country from Christendom, the Ottoman government must renounce a large portion of its fanatical prejudices, and . . . be content to receive the elements of political instruction from one or more of the Christian Powers.'<sup>1</sup> So he was writing in 1826. And so he continued to think; in 1832 he writes to Palmerston that 'an approach to the civilisation of Christendom' was the only chance remaining to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> In 1848 he assures Palmerston that he continues a 'Radical, though I trust a prudent one' in Turkish affairs;<sup>3</sup> the proper management of Reform remained his preoccupation when the Peace of Paris was being negotiated in 1856. Till the end, he retained his belief in Reform; the abuses, it is true, were still there, and there was much in them 'to dishearten the advocates of Turkish revival;' but even in 1877 he still did not consider them irremediable, he still hoped that with enough perseverance, enough hard work, enough energy, Turkey would emerge, at last, in the likeness of a European state.<sup>4</sup> That was the best that could happen.

What did this ideal imply, and how could it be reconciled with the actual state of the Empire? Reform meant efficient and honest government under the rule of law; it meant that all subjects were treated as independent individuals, and as such the possessors of equal rights; it meant the disappearance of privileges and disabilities and it meant, eventually, responsible self-government in which all the groups, communities and nationalities of the Empire had a share. These aspirations were incompatible with the Ottoman fact: namely, that the constitution of the Empire was grounded on Muslim domination, and that the privileges of Muslims and the disabilities of non-Muslims were its governing principle. Stratford Canning well knew what he had to fight: 'The great mischief of this country is the dominant religion. This is the real "Leviathan" which, "floating many a rood", overlaps the prostrate energies of this country.'<sup>5</sup> If such was his belief, then the principles of Stratford Canning were subversive of the Ottoman state. But, whether subversive or not, they were irrelevant to its

<sup>1</sup> Lane-Poole, vol. I, pp. 425-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> Stratford de Redcliffe, p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Temperley, *England and the Near East*, 1936, p. 223.

situation. These principles, the fruit of a political experience confined to England, and perhaps to a few other European countries, assumed the existence of a sense of public responsibility in the governors, and an independent reasoning attitude to government in the governed. Now, the political tradition of the East is different. A sense of public responsibility is not considered there essential to the management of public affairs; indeed, to manifest such a sense is to be suspected of cloaking unusually sinister private ends. Again, the only attitude of the governed towards government is passive obedience; in the East, power is always legitimate power. The introduction of these European principles could then only mean the introduction of turmoil, agitation and disruption into the Ottoman Empire;<sup>1</sup> and their success would mean its total destruction. Stratford Canning derived his power to insist on the application of these principles from his position as the Ambassador of England, and thus the Power most concerned to preserve the independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire became the unwitting auxiliary of its destruction. The very actions taken to remedy the situation made the situation irremediable. It was not corruption, not misgovernment, not inefficiency—as Europeans understood these terms—that spelt the ruin of the Ottoman Empire. These things had always been present, but the Empire had remained. What destroyed it, in the end, was the pressure of European ambitions, and perhaps still more, of European example. The Ottoman Empire died of Europe. Of course, it can be argued that Reform, that is the spread of European ways and ideas in the Ottoman Empire, was inevitable and irresistible. This is true, but not what Stratford Canning and those who thought like him argued. Their position was the quite different one that Reform was beneficent and desirable. This is why they have to bear their share of responsibility for what ensued.

Stratford Canning's confidence and sturdy optimism astonish. He believed that there were certain truths about politics and society vouchsafed to him, truths applicable to all climates and ages, the recognition of which brought happiness to men and their disregard misery. He was, in this,

<sup>1</sup> There is at least one instance in which Stratford Canning comments adversely on the effect of Reform—but that was in 1826, before he became personally committed to it. 'The kind of paternal sway,' he writes in a dispatch of April 19, 1826, 'exercised by the powerful and half feudal lords has been made to give way to the rule of beys and pashas appointed as in other parts of the Sultan's dominions, and holding office on such tenure as to make impossible for them to be otherwise than oppressive and rapacious. The consequences of such a change are such as it was easy to foresee; a neglected soil, a diminished population, and that degree of discontent which is almost ripe for rebellion.' Lane-Poole, vol. I, p. 401. On this subject see also W. G. Palgrave, *Essays on Eastern Questions*, 1872, pp. 30-1.

a good representative of English Liberalism. That men are perfectible, that little by little their condition can and must improve, that Progress is a Law which rules all societies, these are some of the original features of the dogma. It is a dogma which, because it assumes that all the important questions of morality and politics have been solved, makes men incurious about the fundamental conditions which rule the lives of others. Stratford Canning was sustained by this creed, and in its light proposed his solution for Ottoman problems. Of course, he did not in any way succeed, but, as he was sure of his views to obstinacy and strong in his will to apply them, he laid down, by and large, the terms in which the Middle Eastern problem has been discussed till the present day. There is something awesome in the spectacle of this man of simple and unreflective beliefs, whose dearest wish was to see 'the Bible . . . go forth with the engine, and every choice assortment of Manchester stuffs . . . have an honest John Bunyan to distribute them',<sup>1</sup> wielding such immense power and taking decisions irrevocably affecting the fate of such a complex and delicate contrivance as the Ottoman Empire.

These were the terms in which he and almost everybody who followed him in England and Europe saw the Ottoman problem: the Ottoman Empire was a living perversity, an unnatural growth, and rotten to its core. It had to be transformed into something more wholesome. This was to be done by Reform, that is, by making the Ottoman state approximate as much as possible to a European state, where there was a central government, amenable to the control and influence of the governed, dealing impartially and according to the same laws with all classes of the population. If the Ottoman Empire was not going to improve on these lines, it were better for the Ottoman Empire to disappear. As Lord Clarendon said in 1865, 'The only way to improve them, is to improve them off the face of the earth.'<sup>2</sup> So, the statesmen of Europe having decided in their wisdom that the Ottoman Empire was sick, therefore the Ottoman Empire had to die. This is the Eastern Question in a nutshell. Now and again, someone might express misgivings, and voice doubts whether this prevalent view was the right one. Lord Beauvale, the British Ambassador in Vienna, questioned whether it was wise to hope so much from Reform which, he said, 'demands a police, a graduated system of uncorrupted tribunals, an honest magistracy and all of them backed by a paid, obedient and disciplined force.' In short, he pointed out that all the factors that made the principles of the reformers succeed in England were absent in

<sup>1</sup> Lane-Poole, vol. II, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Temperley, *loc. cit.*, p. 165.

the East. He put to Lord Palmerston a question which still demands an answer: 'Where no principle of honour no feeling of shame exist, by what is anyone to govern if not by force?'<sup>1</sup> Lord Ponsonby, who was Ambassador at the Porte between the two missions of Stratford Canning, was moved by the discussions on Reform in England and France during the Crimean War, to publish, from his retirement, a pamphlet in which he eloquently controverted the wisdom of this policy. He pointed out that it was not a mere rearrangement of the administration but that it implied a redistribution of political power in favour of the Christians, and he went on to ask: 'If power is to be given to the Christians, how are they to be prevented from using that power to set up their own authority and to put down that of the Mahometans?' 'Turkey,' he said, '... is a sort of popedom, the Sultan is Kaliff; the laws are the Khoran and the commentaries upon that book; and, necessarily, if the authority of the Kaliff and the Khoran, and the Ulema is put down, and another power raised up in its place, the Ottoman Empire will and must be destroyed.'<sup>2</sup> In short, the desire to reform the Ottoman Empire on European lines and the desire to preserve it were contradictory. Beauvale and Ponsonby express a point of view very rare in England then or later. The debate which continued from 1840 until the Ottoman Empire was destroyed was not whether Reform was desirable or not, but whether it would succeed or not. Palmerston and Canning believed that it would; Salisbury and Gladstone, that it would not; this was the only difference between them on the subject; but how agreed they now seem to us in their difference!

Stratford Canning was not a man of the world, and he had an obstinate, confident belief in his opinions; but he also had the virtues of his failings. He was not one to shirk a course he regarded as desirable, because it might present difficulties; or to spare any cost and trouble to himself or to others in the pursuit of his object; neither would he permit illusions as to the cost and trouble involved. So it was with his attitude to Reform. He had decided that this was the only salvation for the Ottoman Empire. He was not content to publish his belief and to urge it on those with whom he was influential whether in England or Constantinople. He saw that this would not be enough. Reform, he knew, demanded resources and knowledge and energy, none of which were to be found in the Ottoman Empire. So that, if Reform was desired, Europe in general and England in particular must be prepared not only to furnish the means by which to

<sup>1</sup> C. K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, 1951, p. 768. Beauvale to Palmerston, May 5, 1841.

<sup>2</sup> Viscount Ponsonby, *Private Letters on the Eastern Question*, Brighton, 1854, p. 28.

carry it through, but actually to see that it was effectively carried through. The two things were in his mind inseparable: Reform meant to him Reform pressed and well-nigh entirely carried out by Europe. As early as 1842 he put the position clearly and categorically to Aberdeen. Should Reform not be actively encouraged, he told him, it was not wise for England to persist in 'the system of vigilant but ineffective admonition now pursued.' Thus, England would not incur the odium of being the ineffectual advocate of an unpopular policy and 'would at least occasion no disappointment to those who look up to her for aid or protection.'<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of his Ambassadorship he summed up, in a letter to Clarendon, the conditions which he had found to be necessary for the success of Reform; he wrote:

'Three levers are requisite. Where are they to be found? First, the provincial authorities to act in a right spirit; secondly, the power of the Government duly exerted for their appointment and direction; thirdly, *a force from without* to keep up a steady animating pressure on the Government.

'The last, I am persuaded, can alone constitute—if even *that* can—a durable and efficient *principe moteur*.'<sup>2</sup>

During his long sojourn in Constantinople he had done his best to be, himself, this *principe moteur*. By pressure and threats, by the strength of his stern will and the ardour of his fiery soul he strove to keep the Sultan and his ministers on the straight and narrow path of Reform. He regarded it as his mission and his duty, and this is what saves his policy from presumption and stamps it with nobility. 'Turkey stands in a very exceptional position towards us,' he was to write in his Memoirs, 'her independence is constantly threatened; her means of resistance are weak; and we have not only spent our treasure, and shed the blood of our soldiers in her defence, but we have pledged our faith to repeat the sacrifice whenever her independence is vitally imperilled. Surely in these circumstances there dwells not only a right but a duty entitling and impelling our government to see that the pledges given by the Sultan be fully redeemed, and that all reforms accepted by him, and deemed essential to the recovery of his Empire's strength, be faithfully, continuously, and practically carried out.'<sup>3</sup>

These two principles of policy, then, he bequeathed to his country: that Reform was a necessity in the East, both in order to insure the well-being

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in S. F. Rodkey, 'Lord Palmerston and the Rejuvenation of Turkey, 1830-41,' in *Journal of Modern History*, 1930, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> Lane-Poole, vol. II, p. 439. Letter to Clarendon, June 3, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> Lane-Poole, vol. II, p. 114.

of its populations, and in order to safeguard the interests of England; and that it was the *duty* of England to see that Reform was carried out properly. To follow the fortunes of these two principles in the history of England's policy in the Middle East is to be provided with a sure guide to the understanding of this policy. For these principles, though of Liberal provenance, came soon to be accepted as axioms by men of all the parties that found themselves successively responsible for the foreign policy of England.

The first principle, that Reform, which is a recasting of society and state in a European mould, is necessary and desirable in the East, holds good to this day in England's policy. It was Liberals and Radicals who first enunciated the principle; this is to be expected, since they were optimists who believed in Progress and in the existence of universal and eternal Laws governing its march. But it was also inevitable that the principle should be implicitly accepted by others who were not Liberals or Radicals at a time when a European was strongly tempted to believe that his own municipal and temporary standards had a universal and eternal validity.

The second principle, that England has a duty to carry out Reform in the East, has had a shorter career. The Liberalism which conceived it—the Liberalism of Stratford Canning—was one compounded of evangelical precept and utilitarian dogma. In consequence, it was not likely to believe that progress and improvement were possible without the continued exertion of the human will in the right direction. It was stern and exacting and imbued with a deep sense of the responsibility lying on those who discovered the right path to direct others to this path and maintain them in it. Towards the end of the century, another kind of Liberalism, stemming from German Idealism, gradually replaced the first one. Where the earlier Liberalism conceived happiness and welfare capable of a clear and commonly accepted definition, and of being brought about by the action of the legislator and the administrator, this later Liberalism regarded welfare and happiness as an internal and private state varying with individuals and not susceptible to legislation. The duty of a statesman, of an administrator, was to help men to self-realisation, that is to the attainment of this condition of private bliss. Men, however, are not solitary; they live in communities; if they are, therefore, to realise themselves fully, they must do so in the bosom of their community or their nation; a community or nation of self-realising men is a self-realising community or nation, that is a self-determined community or nation. The aim of Liberal statesmanship then, is no longer to provide and maintain the—well-known—conditions in which individuals can live in security and freedom; it is to

allow individuals the supreme good of realising themselves by being members of self-determined nations. Liberals ceased to believe in the duty of England to see that Eastern countries where she had interests and influence were well or tolerably governed; what they now believed was that England should allow such countries to determine their fate for themselves, this being the greatest benefit that England could confer on them. The doctrine is found fully manifest in 1919, but until the outbreak of war in 1914, it is the older Liberalism that still seemed to be in the ascendent.

II

The great question, then, was whether the Ottoman Empire would reform or would not reform. When, in Stratford Canning's time, Reform did not seem to advance, or when matters, instead of improving, became actually worse, this was explained by the extreme difficulty of the task, the inexperience of the Porte, and the obstruction of reactionaries. All of which only served to incite Stratford Canning to redouble his efforts to assist, persuade and compel the Porte to continue the good work. In truth, the fundamental reason for the ill-success of Reform was that its principles were alien and irrelevant to the Ottoman Empire. Even if they had not been so, they were still bound to produce disturbances; if only for the reason that they were advocated by Christians and foreigners whose primary aim was to safeguard the interests of their countries, and who were, therefore, always suspect of enmity towards Islam and the Ottoman Empire. Any intervention of theirs could naturally be looked on as tending to the disruption of the Empire. The Reis Effendi in 1824 asked bitterly why the Powers should intervene in the Greek Revolution, which was an internal affair: ' . . . on what ground is it attempted to justify this monstrous pretension? Because forsooth, the Turkish arms have not yet succeeded in quelling the rebellion!'<sup>1</sup> Any European intervention would be always regarded with a suspicion and bitterness which, deep-seated and lasting, would always stand in the way of Reform.

If the attempt to reform the Empire continued, one of two things would happen: either the Ottoman Empire would perish from the introduction of so many incompatible principles within its system, or it would become a protectorate of Europe. But it could not become the protectorate of a single Power: the other Powers would not allow it. So, again, one of two things were to be expected: either the Powers would quarrel over the division, or they would divide peaceably. Gradually, as the century advanced, these questions began to clamour for answers from

<sup>1</sup> Lane-Poole, vol. I, p. 397.

England and Europe. The answers that England and Europe could give were necessarily limited to these bare alternatives.

Reform had to lead to protection. Stratford Canning himself came at last to recognise this. In a letter to *The Times* of December 31, 1875, he wrote that the measures of Reform which he was still advocating 'reduced to a system, would doubtless amount to a tutelage; but,' he went on, 'the Turkish Empire has long been virtually in that state.'<sup>1</sup> That protection and supervision, more or less far-reaching, were necessary, came increasingly to be asserted by men of all political opinions. If you were a Conservative, like Lord Percy, you recognised that the Ottoman Empire was rapidly running downhill, that coercion of some kind was necessary to halt this course, that the course must be halted not because there was anything worth preserving in the Ottoman Empire, but because the Empire must be shielded 'from external pressure on the part of ourselves and others which might impair or destroy its precarious equilibrium.' The destruction of this equilibrium was very much feared as it would bring on, so it was thought, a fierce and mortal struggle.<sup>2</sup> Or, if you were a staunch, old-fashioned Liberal like the Duke of Argyll, anxious to uphold 'the eternal laws of righteousness,' you, also, demanded that the Ottoman government be coerced into Reform. 'The whole tone we adopted towards the Porte,' you would claim, 'was the tone of a great civilised Power towards an inferior and semi-barbarous Government, for whose very existence we had a heavy responsibility, and with whose action towards its own people we had a corresponding right and duty to interfere.'<sup>3</sup> Both Conservative and Liberal would agree with Bouchier, *The Times* correspondent in the Balkans, that 'the "Sick Man" needs a physician who will not only prescribe for the malady but superintend the application of the remedy.'<sup>4</sup>

Salisbury was one of the first to see where things were tending, and to try to devise and carry out a new policy. Even before becoming Foreign Secretary in 1878, he had made up his mind that the Ottoman Empire—or what remained of it—was, at best, a *pis aller*. Rather than attempt to

<sup>1</sup> Stratford de Redcliffe, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Earl Percy (1871-1909) was an Under-Secretary of State for India and for Foreign Affairs successively in Balfour's administration of 1902-6. He had travelled extensively in Turkey and had written two books about it, *Notes from a Diary in Asiatic Turkey*, 1898, and *The Highlands of Asiatic Turkey*, 1901, which are still quite readable. The interest of his opinions is that they are typical of Conservative views on the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century. The quotation is from *The Highlands of Asiatic Turkey*, p. 279.

<sup>3</sup> Duke of Argyll, *Our Responsibilities for Turkey*, 1896, pp. 19-21, 36-8.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in *The History of The Times*, part IV, vol. I, p. 75.



shore up the ruin, it were far better to bring it down and proceed to a division among the interested parties. 'In the past he had condemned the Crimean War, and he used constantly to deplore the supreme opportunity which had been lost when the Western Powers refused the Emperor Nicholas' proposal for partition.'<sup>1</sup> So his daughter describes his views in the 1870s. These views were to remain unchanged till the end of his life. 'I believe,' he was to write to the Duke of Rutland in November 1898, 'that under the guidance of Palmerston and Lord Stratford de Redcliffe we made a grave blunder in deserting the alliances of 1805. We sacrificed the alliance of a Power that was growing, for a Power that was evidently decaying.'<sup>2</sup> Salisbury also believed that the sooner the Ottoman Empire was partitioned, the better for everybody. 'I feel convinced,' he wrote to Lord Lytton in March 1877, 'that the old policy—wise enough in its time—of defending English interests by sustaining the Ottoman dynasty has become impracticable and I think that the time has come for defending English interests in a more direct way by some territorial rearrangement. I fear that when we come to the same thing some years later, one of two things will have happened. Either France will have recovered her position and be jealous of any extension of our power in the Mediterranean,—or Germany will have become a naval power. Either of these contingencies will make it difficult for us to provide ourselves with a pied-a-terre, in place of that which we shall infallibly lose at Constantinople. Arrangements which may be easy now will be impossible five years hence.'<sup>3</sup> He was to admit in later years that to have partitioned the Ottoman Empire in 1878 'would have required a promptitude and energy in the conduct of our diplomacy which could not have been looked for under its then direction.'<sup>4</sup> But neither were promptitude and energy to be expected later when, in 1895 and 1898 he came back to his original idea and proposed partition to Russia.<sup>5</sup> By then, of course, Germany had also to be reckoned with, and Germany did not seem to acquiesce in such a solution.

Partition out of the question, there remained the only other alternative, namely, a supervision such as would make the Ottoman Empire a protectorate of Europe. To this alternative Salisbury turned. Immediately after the Treaty of Berlin, he was busy with a scheme whereby, in return for a loan from England, the Porte would undertake to accept Reform

<sup>1</sup> Lady Gwendolen Cecil, *Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury*, vol. II, 1921, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> C. Whibley, *Lord John Manners and his Friends*, 1925, vol. II, pp. 278-9.

<sup>3</sup> Cecil, vol. II, p. 130.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 134-5.

<sup>5</sup> See his dispatch to Lascelles at St. Petersburg of August 5, 1895, *Accounts and Papers*, vol. XCV, 1896, p. 227, and his dispatch to Sir N. O'Connor at St. Petersburg of January 25, 1898, in Gooch and Temperley, vol. I, p. 8.

and to put its execution in the hands of Englishmen.<sup>1</sup> Such a policy, no less than that of partition, was dependent on the goodwill of the Powers, which was as difficult to obtain in this case as in the other. We find Salisbury always exhorting the Powers to come to an agreement and to act in concert at the Porte.<sup>2</sup> The exhortations naturally went unheeded since the Powers had divergent interests in the Ottoman Empire and were not likely to support each other without the prior reconciliation of their different aims. So little had the difficulty lessened on the eve of the Great War, that Sir Louis Mallet, commenting in 1913 on a Turkish proposal of an alliance between England and Turkey, had to say that however desirable such an alliance might be, it was not 'within practical politics' as it would 'in present circumstances, unite Europe against us and be a source of weakness and danger to ourselves and Turkey.'<sup>3</sup>

If no agreement was to be reached, either about partition or about protection, the result, Salisbury foresaw, would be 'a fearful confusion'. In his pessimism, he compared the break-down of the Ottoman Empire to that of the Roman Empire in the West. 'It is worth while', he wrote to Layard in 1879, 'exhausting every source of argument and menace to avert such a catastrophe.'<sup>4</sup>

But suppose there were a partition, suppose the times propitious and the Powers willing. How would the partition be carried out? Which regions would go to which Powers? There existed, obviously, no hard and fast agreements; but there were notions, assumptions, expectations, that if and when the Ottoman Empire came to be partitioned certain regions would go to certain Powers. These potential arrangements depended on many different factors; a Power was thought to be entitled to a certain region, either because the region was strategically necessary to it, or because it had economic interests there, or again, because the region was traditionally within its sphere of influence. When Salisbury proposed partition to Russia in 1898, he tentatively suggested 'that the portion of Turkey which drains into the Black Sea, together with the drainage valley of the Euphrates as far as Baghdad, interest Russia much more than England: whereas Turkish Africa, Arabia and the Valley of the Euphrates below Baghdad interest England much more than Russia.'<sup>5</sup> Again, when Salisbury was trying to set up his scheme of English supervision of finances in the Ottoman Empire, he wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer

<sup>1</sup> Cecil, vol. II, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, a dispatch from Salisbury to O'Connor of October 20, 1896, in Turkey (no. 2) Cmd. 8304 (1897), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum in Gooch and Temperley, vol. X, part I, p. 901.

<sup>4</sup> Cecil, vol. II, p. 319.

<sup>5</sup> Gooch and Temperley, vol. I, p. 8.

that Southern Syria might be excluded from the reforms in order to please France.<sup>1</sup> Balfour might well profess himself unable, in 1919, to understand on what historic basis the French claim to Syria really rested,<sup>2</sup> but whether the basis existed or not, the claim was allowed by the British Government before 1914, and the French and other Governments so advised.<sup>3</sup> A good index of the claims of the different Powers on the Ottoman estate lies in a dispatch of June 1913, from Sir Gerard Lowther at Constantinople to Sir Edward Grey, commenting on Turkish proposals for the appointment of European Inspectors-General for the provinces: 'The line of least resistance and friction in the matter would seem to be that the foreign officials for the North East Anatolian provinces should be Russian; those for Mesopotamia, British; those for Syria, French; and those for Adana and Western Asia Minor, German or other.' These schemes of virtual partition had one vital failing: they all left aside the question of Constantinople and the Straits; not without reason, since the question was crucial; Russia was determined on their possession and the other Powers as determined to deny them to Russia. So long as this question remained unsettled, the Ottoman state had a good chance of survival, but once the question was settled, its demise could not be long in coming.

The peaceful partition of the Ottoman Empire had many virtues in Salisbury's eyes. It would settle in a lasting manner the vexed Middle Eastern problem, and allow the Powers to achieve the ends for which they had continually to intrigue and quarrel at Constantinople. It would also remove the danger of the area falling into the confusion of which Salisbury was so much afraid. If the Empire were partitioned, the regions falling to the lot of the different Powers would be directly administered by them as colonies or dependencies; for the assumption was that these regions could in no way govern themselves and that improvement in their condition could come from replacing Ottoman rule only by European rule. 'There can be no question of autonomy—of young and struggling nationalities and the rest of it.'<sup>4</sup> If you were going to partition,

<sup>1</sup> Cecil, vol. II, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum by Mr. Balfour, in *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, First Series, vol. IV, 1952, p. 340.

<sup>3</sup> See a minute of May 1913 by Mr. Norman, in Gooch and Temperley, vol. X, part I, p. 435; Poincaré's declaration to the French Senate in December 1912, in R. Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, vol. II, Paris 1926, p. 412; and Grey's declaration to the German Ambassador in London of January 1913, in Gooch and Temperley, vol. IX, part II, p. 444.

<sup>4</sup> Gooch and Temperley, vol. X, part I, p. 447.

<sup>5</sup> Cecil, vol. II, pp. 267-8; Salisbury to Layard, May 9, 1878.

you must occupy and you must provide good government, otherwise there was no sense in the undertaking. When England occupied Egypt in 1882, and it was proposed to withdraw the British troops a few months later, it came to be seen that this was impossible. The old system of government had been destroyed by the shock of the British occupation, and to leave the country would have meant to abandon it to chaos and to forsake all hope of Reform—which had been held for so long now as the only hope of the East. In fact, the occupation of Egypt by England could now provide the opportunity for putting into practice the very principles for which Liberals had stood for so long. Hence the Dufferin mission, and hence the choice of Baring to go out as Consul-General. Baring, it must be remembered, was a Liberal and he came to Egypt 'fired with the ambition', to use his own words, 'of leading the Egyptian people from bankruptcy to solvency and then onward to affluence, from Khedivial monstrosities to British justice, and from Oriental methods veneered with European civilisation towards the true civilisation of the West based on the principles of the Christian moral code.'<sup>1</sup>

There is, in this passage, an idea that begins from then on to appear more and more frequently in English writings on the East. The idea is that the old methods of the East are being 'veneered' with European civilisation. This was held as another reason why European countries should see to it that European Reform adopted in the East was of the right kind. It was now recognised that the impact of Europe was inevitable but not always beneficial. So that another duty became incumbent on the European Powers with interests in the East. They had now, not only to change the cruel and inefficient methods of Eastern government, but to prevent Western influence from being harmful. Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, who accompanied Lord Dufferin to Egypt in 1882, takes up this idea as a main theme in his *Egypt and the Egyptian Question*,<sup>2</sup> and Baring himself was later to express his awareness of this aspect of the relations of East and West. 'Consider', he wrote in *Ancient and Modern Imperialism*, 'what has happened to India. The most practical and energetic of Western has been brought into contact with the most contemplative of Eastern nations, with the result that the old ideals have been shattered, and that the very foundations on which the edifice of society rests are in process of being undermined. On what foundation is that edifice to be rebuilt? . . . The country over which the breath of the West, heavily charged with scientific

<sup>1</sup> Zetland, *Lord Cromer*, 1932, pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Published in 1883. The book perhaps still remains the best one in English on modern Egypt.

thought, has once passed, and has, in passing, left an enduring mark, can never be the same as it was before. The new foundations must be of the Western, not of the Eastern type. As Sir H. Maine very truly remarks, the British nation in dealing with India "cannot evade the duty of rebuilding on its own principles that which it unwittingly destroyed".<sup>1</sup> The purpose, therefore, of a direct English administration of these Eastern territories, was both to introduce European methods and aims of government, and to control the harmful effects which unchecked European influence might bring. This was a hopeful and generous doctrine which expected better things to come to the East with European domination, but which did not make light of the difficulties, or expect improvement without continual and unremitting control. Eventually it was hoped that new native governments, reformed root and branch, would be able to carry on by themselves; but before they could be allowed to do so they had to furnish proofs of capability. This was Cromer's view, and that of most of the administrators whom he assembled round him in Egypt. Both the optimism and the sense of responsibility it betokens are characteristic of the Liberalism which guided them; they assumed a mission to teach the East the goodly ways of the West, and their pupils, they hoped, would be convinced of the excellence of these ways and be eager to learn and follow them. They did not stop to consider that these ways were the local and patient achievement of one particular tradition, and that tradition does not travel well; but then, it was not for nothing that they were optimists and Liberals. Their attitude was admirably expressed by Lord Milner: 'We could not let you continue in the old paths,' he makes the Englishman say to the Egyptian, 'because they were a proved failure. Had you had the capacity and the character to keep things straight, there would have been no insolvency, no revolution, no necessity for our interference. But, on the other hand, we English don't want to stay in your country for ever. We don't despair of your learning to manage decently your own affairs. If we were to go away tomorrow, you would not succeed in doing so, because you have not shaken off the old tradition. You still require a deal of training in a better school. But, at the same time, if we were to take the government of the country entirely out of your hands, you would never learn to do better. You need to be shown what to do, but you also need to practise doing it. You need energy, initiative, self-reliance. How

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 117-20. David Urquhart had already, in the 1830s, perceived in his own brilliant and erratic manner the fundamental change being worked in the East, as a result of contact with Europe; see *The Spirit of the East*, 1838, vol. I, pp. 368-70.

could you develop them if we were to keep you absolutely in leading strings?'<sup>1</sup>

There were certain European institutions which the nineteenth-century reformers, however enthusiastic and optimistic, held to be unsuitable for the Ottoman Empire. Of these were parliamentary and representative institutions. Stratford Canning and Palmerston were agreed on this point, and their opinion was never questioned throughout the whole nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Even Liberals of a different persuasion from Stratford Canning, like Sir William Gregory who thought that 'the Egyptians, however degraded they may be from centuries of oppression, ought to have a voice in the government of their country,'<sup>3</sup> believed that parliamentary institutions were irrelevant to Eastern problems. 'The burden of my song is,' he wrote to Layard in January 1882, 'there can only be one Governor. Parliamentary government, in the European sense, is impossible at present. You have neither strength enough, nor education enough for it. Your work is to do away patiently and carefully with the manifold abuses which afflict you.'<sup>4</sup>

Such, then, was the highroad of doctrine concerning the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. It was always possible to deviate from it, but the deviations were thought to lead to a mere blind alley. Still, there were a few who deviated, those whom Wilfrid Scawen Blunt called 'Urquhart's school of Orientalists'.<sup>5</sup> These men saw the piteous condition of the Ottoman Empire but drew quite another conclusion as to the reasons of the decadence and the remedy required. The Ottoman Empire suffered from misgovernment, from disorder, from rebellions not because of an inherent fault in Easterners, but because of the interference and the intrigues of the Europeans and the misguided attempts of the Ottomans to copy European institutions and manners. Let the Ottomans return to the pristine principles of the Muslim religion and carry out the political precepts laid down in the Quran, and all would yet be calm, order and beauty in their Empire. These principles, they said, contain the true essence of liberty and democracy; if they were followed, individual liberty and public order would be secure in the Ottoman lands. On the other

<sup>1</sup> Milner, *England in Egypt*, 11th edition, 1904, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> This point was established and illustrated by Professor Temperley in his article 'British Policy towards Parliamentary Rule and Constitutionalism in Turkey 1830-1914' in *Cambridge Historical Journal*, vol. IV, 1933.

<sup>3</sup> Sir William Gregory was an advocate of Arabi's movement. See *An Autobiography*, 1894, p. 380.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>5</sup> In a letter of 1903 to Sir Sidney Cockerell; see V. Meynell (ed.), *Friends of a Lifetime*, 1940, p. 169.

hand, any interference by Europe, of whatever kind, was, by definition, evil. The opinions of David Urquhart and of Lord Stanley of Alderley tended in this direction. Wilfrid Blunt took them a step further. The evil in the Ottoman Empire, according to him, was not a consequence of a recent incursion by Europe in the area; it was far older, in a sense original to the foundation of the Empire, for it was then that Europe had really begun to exercise its nefarious influence in the East. 'The Ottoman Sultan, when he at last found himself established in Cæsar's seat, wielded the self-same weapons that had been borne by Maximin and Caracalla. He adopted the militarism of the Empire *en bloc*, with its land-tax and tribute and its evil tradition of rule, half force, half fraud. . . .'<sup>1</sup> The decline of the Ottoman Empire had, then, begun at its very foundation. For the disorder now to be seen in the Ottoman Empire was constitutional and would disappear only with its disappearance. 'It is outside my present purpose to insist upon the *abuses* of power under Turkish rule. It is the power itself that is evil.'<sup>2</sup> Salvation could only come from these principles which the Ottomans had abandoned in order to ape Byzantine forms of government. 'In Nejd alone of all the countries of the world I have visited, either East or West, the three great blessings of which we in Europe make our boast, though we do not in truth possess them, are a living reality: 'Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood,' names only, even in France, where they are written upon every wall, but here practically enjoyed by every free man. Here was a community living as our idealists have dreamed, without taxes, without police, without conscription of any kind, whose only law was public opinion, and whose only order a principle of honour.'<sup>3</sup> The only thing to do then, was to extend this system to the Ottoman lands, and there was a solution of the Ottoman problem. 'In connection with Peninsular Arabia, we may expect to see communities founded on similar principles [as those of Nejd] arise in Mesopotamia and Irak. . . . The transition from Turkish law to Arabian custom would be natural and easy. . . . A return to this state of things would be hailed with enthusiasm by the citizens. . . .'<sup>4</sup> He goes on to advocate an independent Armenia, the cession of the Greek colonies of the Anatolian coast to Greece, and a confinement of the Turk to central Anatolia. The settlement of Syria on such principles arouses in him a few misgivings, since Syria contains so many races and religions; let it then be protected by a European Power—and possibly

<sup>1</sup> W. S. Blunt, 'The Sultan's Heirs in Asia,' *Fortnightly Review*, July 1880, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> W. S. Blunt, *loc. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> W. S. Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt*, New Edition, 1924, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> W. S. Blunt, *loc. cit.*, p. 25.

occupied—but only for a few years; ‘let the plan of her future government be drawn for her on Oriental lines. The instinct of communal life introduced by the Arabs exists among nearly all classes of Syrians, and should be sedulously fostered. . . .’<sup>1</sup> These views would have been regarded, before 1914, as ignorant and lunatic fantasies; and yet in 1919, they became the ground on which staid Civil Servants, and politicians in a hurry, built their plans. Such was the extent of the revolution in ideas brought about by the War.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.



*The Making of the Sykes-Picot Agreement*

THE rise of the German Empire after 1870 was bound to throw the European Balance of Power into confusion. Traditional alliances had to be reviewed and long-standing assumptions about European politics to be put in question. Bismarck's dismissal and the Kaiser's direction of German policy made the matter more urgent than ever before. England found herself gradually involved in a system of continental alliances which seemed designed to contain and resist German ambitions. By 1906 she was committed to a French alliance; the French alliance led to an understanding with Russia which, in turn, led to the final estrangement of the Ottoman Empire from England. So that, if the possession of Constantinople and the existence of the Ottoman Empire were ever again to be in question, England would have no option but to depart in some measure, at least, from the principles of its Eastern policy of the nineteenth century, namely, the denial of Constantinople to Russia, and the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The abandonment of these principles meant a revolution in English policy, the outcome of which was all the more uncertain in that it occurred at a time when the European order itself was about to be shaken to its foundations. It fell to Sir Edward Grey to begin this revolution, and no one began a revolution with more misgivings, but also no one could have been less aware of the forces that such a revolution would set free.

## I

When the War began, the eyes of the Government in London were upon the Western front where all available resources had been engaged, and where it was hoped to achieve a quick and decisive result. There was little thought, or manpower, or arms that could be spared for use against the Ottomans, when these joined the Central Powers in October 1914. A small expedition from India to the Persian Gulf was meant to be no more than a sign asserting England's authority in these waters, in order to give aid and comfort to the miscellaneous shaikhs under her protection, and if possible, to save the oil installations of Abadan from capture by the

enemy.<sup>1</sup> Egypt had to fend for itself out of its own small resources and to repulse, as best it could, the Ottoman attack on Suez in February 1915. The idea of a second front against either the Austrian or the Ottoman regions to take the Central Powers in the flank, came indeed very soon to be mooted as a means of breaking the deadlock on the Western front.<sup>2</sup> But Kitchener, then Secretary of State for War, though he was, himself, at the end of 1914, in favour of establishing such a front by means of a landing at Alexandretta, insisted, nevertheless, that no resources could, for the time being, be spared for such an operation.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of January 1915, however, the Russians asked for a diversion against the Ottoman armies which were pressing them hard in the Caucasus.<sup>4</sup> From this circumstance grew the project of forcing the Dardanelles and the campaign of Gallipoli, which gave rise to the Russian demand that, in case of Allied victory, Constantinople should be annexed by the Tsar. On the Ottomans joining the War, Grey had instructed the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg to say that in the event of German defeat 'the question of Constantinople and the Straits would be decided in conformity with Russian needs.' This was the farthest that Grey, to start with, would go; and he would not have gone so far had there not been in Russia, at that time, a pro-German agitation, conducted by persons of influence which, it was feared, might succeed in detaching Russia from the Allies.<sup>5</sup> When the Gallipoli operations began, the Russians at once pressed their allies for a more binding commitment on Constantinople.<sup>6</sup> But both England and France were unwilling and circumspect. Grey's reluctance to discuss the subject appears from the dispatch of Benckendorff, the Russian Ambassador in London, to Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, reporting the result of his approach: 'He [Grey] formulated no definite objections,' he wrote on March 3, 1915, 'but added that before making a statement, the British Government had to acquaint itself with the views of France. Even in this case, the immediate opening

<sup>1</sup> F. J. Moberly, *Official History of the War, The Campaign in Mesopotamia*, vol. I 1923, chapter V.

<sup>2</sup> C. F. Aspinall-Oglander, *Official History of the War Military Operations, Gallipoli*, vol. I 1929, pp. 49-50.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> *The History of The Times*, part IV, vol. II, 1952, p. 1079. Appendix II of this volume (pp. 1077-84) contains a concise account of the policy of the Great Powers concerning the Straits just before and during the First World War.

<sup>6</sup> How the Gallipoli operations precipitated the Russian demand for Constantinople is discussed in A. Pingaud, *Histoire Diplomatique de la France Pendant la Grande Guerre*, vol. I, Paris, 1938, p. 245.

up of this question in Parliament would make it necessary to broach the question of economic conditions in particular. Russia's increases of territory would furthermore open up the question of the partition of the whole of Turkey, thus whetting the appetites of many Powers. . . . He was opposed to the public discussion of partition as Turkey had not yet been conquered.<sup>1</sup> Grey's objections and qualifications are indication enough of his hesitation and anxiety. The President of the French Republic, Poincaré, writing to the French Ambassador at St. Petersburg, could be more explicit: 'The attribution of Constantinople, Thrace, the Straits and the coasts of the Sea of Marmara to Russia implies the partition of the Ottoman Empire. We have no good reason to wish for such a partition.'<sup>2</sup> He went on to say that Russia's possession of Constantinople must introduce her into the Mediterranean and perhaps make of her a great naval Power. 'Everything would therefore be changed in the European balance.' But Russian pressure could not, in the event, be withstood. Rather than give a handle to the pro-German party at St. Petersburg and create a rift among the Allies, England and France agreed that Constantinople should go to Russia; 'but,' says Grey, 'neither we nor the French liked the thing.'<sup>3</sup>

The decision on Constantinople had, perforce, to lead to other decisions. Indeed, immediately the matter had been raised by the Russians, the French laid down the terms on which they could meet the Russian desires; on March 4, 1915, Paléologue informed Sazonov that 'the Government of the Republic intends to annex Syria including the area of the Gulf of Alexandretta and Cilicia up to the Taurus. . . .'<sup>4</sup> Constantinople meant a great increase in Russian power, which neither France nor England could accept without securing for themselves balancing advantages. The Constantinople agreement was, therefore, the true progenitor of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. One thing had to lead to another, and there could have been no way of confining the diplomatic revolution to the sole issue of Constantinople. As Poincaré told Paléologue when the Russians first made their demand: 'Tout est forcément lié.'<sup>5</sup> Granted, then, that Russia was to have Constantinople and other Turkish territories, the question remained to be settled between France and England what each of them would receive in order to counter-balance the Russian gains.

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Adamov, ed., *Die Europäischen Mächte und die Türkei während des Weltkrieges. Die Aufteilung der Asiatischen Türkei*, Dresden, 1932, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> R. Poincaré, vol. VI, Paris, 1930, p. 94. Letter to Paléologue of March 9, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Viscount Grey, *Twenty-Five Years* (1925), People's Library Edition, 1928, vol. III, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> Adamov, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Poincaré, vol. VI, p. 94.

France had a long-standing and, more or less, recognised claim to the Levant; but the precise area to be attributed to her remained to be defined. England had interests in the Persian Gulf and its hinterland, and was also anxious to secure the safety of her position in Egypt and of her communications with India. When the Ottoman Empire joined the War, England proclaimed a protectorate over Egypt. This was one more reason why France should seek a settlement in which her interests would be recognised.<sup>1</sup> These factors dictated the broad lines of the discussions on which England and France now engaged. For as soon as the question of Constantinople was settled, Cambon, the French Ambassador in London, proposed to Grey to begin discussions on French and English interests in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> The French, it has been seen, had already staked a claim to Cilicia and Syria. By Syria, they understood 'the Mediterranean littoral as far south as the Egyptian border and as far East as Damascus.'<sup>3</sup> As for England, when Benckendorff approached Grey about Constantinople, the latter said 'that England had no aspirations to any part of Asia Minor and Syria, apart from one point on the territory of the Persian Coast. . . .'<sup>4</sup> Grey's language, on this occasion was, no doubt, designed to discourage the Russians from pursuing a binding agreement about Constantinople. Later when the agreement was concluded, he spoke with greater precision, and indicated that England had views on Basra: 'Without making any declaration on its future fate, England cannot, from the moment this point is occupied, agree to its return to Turkey and will have to make special rights for herself.'<sup>5</sup> About Basra, then, Grey seemed firmly decided. But he hesitated about the fate of Mesopotamia as a whole. He told Cambon in March 1915 that he was not certain whether or not England should put forward a claim for herself in that region.<sup>6</sup> Had the

<sup>1</sup> For a French comment on the proclamation of the protectorate over Egypt, see H. Paleologue, *La Russie des Tsar spendant la Grande Guerre*, Paris, 1921, vol. I, p. 194. The Russians had not been slow to indicate that they would require compensation in Constantinople and the Straits in return for their approval of the English Protectorate over Egypt. See Sazonov's telegram to Benckendorff, and Buchanan's telegram to Grey, both of November 18, 1914 in *Die Internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus*, Series II, vol. 6, part II, Berlin, 1934, pp. 459-60.

<sup>2</sup> Grey, vol. III, pp. 211-12. Dispatch from Grey to Bertie, March 23, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Report of a Committee set up to consider certain Correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon . . . and the Sharif of Mecca in 1915 and 1916, Cmd. 5974 (1939), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Adamov, p. 12. A memorandum of March 12, 1915 presented by Buchanan to Sazonov, printed in Adamov, pp. 23-6, speaks of the British desire to make the neutral zone which the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907 interposed between the Russian and the British spheres of influence in Persia, into a British sphere of influence.

<sup>5</sup> Adamov, pp. 48-9. Benckendorff to Sazonov, December 30, 1915.

<sup>6</sup> Grey, vol. III, p. 212.

question rested with him alone, he would have strongly preferred England not to add to her overseas territories.<sup>1</sup> Professor Temperley has called Grey an academic Whig, and the appellation is exact. He did believe that if the Entente Powers were victorious in the War, the despots enslaving the peoples would be overthrown and a secure and lasting system of free, self-governing nations on the Anglo-Saxon model could be established. When, in 1908, the Young Turk Revolution occurred, Grey welcomed it and said: 'We were against the Turkish Government when it was bad . . . but between us and the people there was not, and never had been, any barrier.' Later he described the results of this revolution as 'marvellous'.<sup>2</sup> These are, no doubt, the *clichés* of the politician; but they serve to indicate his inclinations and the way in which he tended to think of political questions. English policy in the Middle East was, however, not within his sole province to decide. An inter-departmental committee under the chairmanship of Sir Maurice de Bunsen of the Foreign Office, was appointed to formulate a policy for the future of the Ottoman Empire in Asia.<sup>3</sup> The report of this committee has not been published, save for an extract concerning Palestine,<sup>4</sup> from which it appears that the Committee recommended that the French demand for the inclusion of Palestine in the territory claimed by them should be opposed. 'Palestine', said the Committee, 'must be recognised as a country whose destiny must be the subject of special negotiations, in which both belligerents and neutrals are interested.' There was at least one member of the Government who had definite ideas which do not seem to have tallied with those of Grey, about the disposal of the Ottoman territories. This was Kitchener. A Memorandum by George Antonius, Secretary to the Arab Delegations at the Palestine Round Table Conference of 1939, throws some light on these ideas. 'Although Great Britain had in 1912 accepted the view that Syria was politically a French preserve,' says Antonius, 'the thought began to gain ground in certain British circles that, in the event of a break-up of the Ottoman Empire, an effort should

<sup>1</sup> See Asquith's entry in his diary for March 25, 1915: 'Grey and I had a really interesting conversation about the whole international situation. Winston is very anxious that if, when the War ends, Russia has got Constantinople, and Italy Dalmatia, and France Syria, we should be able to appropriate some equivalent share of the spoils—Mesopotamia with or without Alexandretta, a sphere in Persia, and some German colonies, etc. I believe that at the moment Grey and I are the only two men who doubt and distrust any such settlement.' Earl of Oxford and Asquith, *Memories and Reflections, 1852-1927*, vol. II, 1928, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Temperley, *loc. cit.*, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Shane Leslie, *Mark Sykes: His Life and Letters*, 1923, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Cmd. 5974 (1939), p. 51.

be made to detach Southern Syria as far north as Haifa and Acre to form a separate entity and to fall under British influence. It is a matter of common knowledge, among those who knew Lord Kitchener's mind, that he became strongly imbued with the idea and worked for its propagation in official circles before the War.<sup>1</sup> According to Poincaré, Kitchener seems also to have opposed the attribution of Alexandretta, Adana and Cilicia to France.<sup>2</sup> Kitchener, then, would be one to oppose some, at least, of the claims of France, not out of a doctrinaire desire, such as perhaps moved Grey, to see independent nations in this area, but because he considered that England's interests in India and Egypt required to be consolidated by the occupation of certain strategic areas in the Ottoman Empire. Kitchener, in fact, envisaged a partition of the Ottoman Empire between the Great Powers. It is immaterial whether he meant England actually to occupy the zones in which she was interested, or to manifest by other means her preponderating influence in them. This must be the implication of a remark of Balfour's, made in 1919, at the time of the difficulties with France over the Middle East. 'It is of course quite true', said Balfour, 'that the Sykes-Picot Agreement ought never to have given Mosul to France. But it *did*; and that through no fault of the French, but in consequence of a miscalculation of Lord Kitchener who was unwilling to have territories in which Britain was interested coterminous with a military Monarchy such as Russia then was.'<sup>3</sup> Some, at least, of the preoccupations of the English negotiators are, then, apparent. They were, of course, legitimate ones. Russia had succeeded in securing the end for which she had schemed and fought for so long; France, consequently, was claiming

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12. One indication of Kitchener's schemes may be found in Newcombe's mission to survey the desert of Sinai just before the War; see D. Garnett, ed., *Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, 1938, p. 163. See also Antonius's *Arab Awakening*, 1938, p. 129, on Kitchener's pre-War views concerning German influence in the Ottoman Empire and the means of checking it: 'One [solution] was that a portion of Southern Syria, roughly from the Haifa-Acre Bay in the Mediterranean Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea, might in course of time be detached from the Ottoman Empire and made to come under British protection. . . . Another was that the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire might be encouraged to form themselves into an autonomous state or chain of states friendly to Great Britain . . . an Anglo-Arab dam to stem the Turco-German tide.' See also a letter from Sir V. Gabriel to *The Times*, July 12, 1922, concerning the origins of the negotiations with the Sharif of Mecca: 'I may perhaps add that in 1915, when Lord Kitchener laid the proposition before the Cabinet of which he was a member, I was acting as his personal assistant in regard to Arab matters, and know that his scheme, on which the letter to the Sharif was based, would certainly not have admitted the exclusion of Palestine.'

<sup>2</sup> Poincaré, vol. VII, pp. 362-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Series I, vol. IV, p. 374, Memorandum by Balfour, September 9, 1919.

that which she had always claimed should revert to her on the demise of the Ottomans; England's traditional policy in the Middle East lay in ruins; what could England do, be Grey as reluctant as he liked to add to the colonial possessions of England, but look to her threatened interests and try to protect them? If the Ottoman Empire was to be partitioned among the Powers, England had to take her share, or be resigned to losing her standing in the East. Such is the logic of an Imperial position. England, then, claimed Basra on the Persian Gulf, and Mesopotamia up to Baghdad, together with Haifa, which a railway, it seems, was to connect with the Persian Gulf. These were the claims which confronted Picot, the French delegate, when, in November 1915, he came to London to negotiate in detail the partition of the Ottoman Empire in Asia.<sup>1</sup>

To these fundamental considerations was added a new one, occasioned by the necessities of war. Revolts and disorders within the Ottoman Empire would hasten its collapse, and to promote them was expedient. With this end in view, Kitchener had approached the Sharif of Mecca at the beginning of the War. The Sharif did not reject Kitchener's proposal out of hand, but his co-operation had a price, of which account would have to be taken in the negotiations with France. The claims of the Sharif were present from the start in Grey's mind. When Cambon first spoke to him, in March 1915, about Turkey-in-Asia, Grey said that 'we had already stipulated that, when Turkey disappeared from Constantinople and the Straits, there must, in the interests of Islam, be an independent Moslem political unit somewhere else. Its centre would naturally be the Moslem Holy Places, and it would include Arabia. But,' he added, 'we must settle what else should be included.'<sup>2</sup> During the long negotiations that followed, the interests of the Sharif and his associates were not allowed to be forgotten. In October 1915, Poincaré records, England had already informed the French of the negotiations with the Sharif. In mid-November Poincaré refers to the same subject: 'He [Grey] has once again spoken to our Ambassador of the Arab empire the foundation of which seems necessary to Great Britain in order to counterbalance the influence of the Turk. He has hinted that the Arabs would probably claim certain areas which we consider as dependencies of Syria. He said he would leave it to us to

<sup>1</sup> Pingaud, vol. III, 1940, pp. 226-7. Pingaud's work is based on the Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and here summarises a memorandum in which Sir Mark Sykes set out the British claims. H. F. Frischwasser-Ra'anani, *The Frontiers of a Nation*, 1955, pp. 69-72 discusses the boundaries of British and French areas as finally delimited in the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

<sup>2</sup> Grey, vol. III, pp. 211-12.

decide what concessions to make.<sup>1</sup> Grey himself, in December 1915, insisted to Benckendorff on the necessity of securing the position of the Sharif in the proposed Agreement. 'The Arabs have appealed to the British Government for the establishment of an Arab state', Grey said, 'to which Arabia and the (Muslim) Holy Places would belong. In so far as this concerns the British Government, they have declared their agreement with this request, on condition that Arabia declares first her hostility to Turkey, and that Syria shall be excluded from this new state in view of our commitments to France.'<sup>2</sup> Grey's anxiety to see the Sharif's claim dealt with honourably, and his interests composed equitably with those of England and France is not surprising. His upbringing, his pride in his country's position, his view of what was permissible in the conduct of foreign affairs, all alike would make him averse from underhand dealings, ambiguous promises and intrigues. It is a mistake to imagine that when he acquiesced in the proposals to the Sharif, and then in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, he was knowingly accepting incompatible and contradictory undertakings.

Not only did Grey press the Sharif's claims on his allies while the negotiations were proceeding, he also took care to ascertain from the Sharif and his friends whether his commitments to France were acceptable to the Arab conspirators. In October 1915, a member of the Arab secret society, *al-'Ahd*, Muhammad Sharif al-Faruqi arrived in Cairo. This person was a staff officer in the Ottoman army in Syria. When Kitchener had approached the Sharif at the beginning of the War to ask for his collaboration, the Sharif sent his son Faisal to Syria and Constantinople to look for sympathisers. Al-Faruqi was among the Arab officers whom Faisal saw in Aleppo in April 1915. This officer knew therefore the state of mind of his fellow conspirators and their ambitions. A little while after Faisal's visit, Jamal Pasha, who was in command in Syria, began to suspect the loyalty of the Arab officers, and arranged to send them to other areas. Al-Faruqi was sent to Gallipoli and put in command of troops at the front. On the pretext of negotiating a truce with the enemy for the burial of the dead and the removal of the wounded from the field of battle, he managed to desert to the English lines, from whence he was forwarded to Cairo.<sup>3</sup> In Cairo he met, among others, Clayton, the Director of Intelligence, Sir

<sup>1</sup> Poincaré, vol. VII, pp. 206, 250.

<sup>2</sup> Adamov, pp. 48-9. Benckendorff to Sazonov, December 30, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> This is al-Faruqi's own account in a letter he sent to the Sharif of Mecca from Cairo on 27 Muharram 1334H/December 6, 1915, printed in Muhammad Tahir al-Umari, *Tarikh Muqaddarat al-Iraq al-Siyasiyya* (History of the Political destinies of Iraq), Baghdad 1924-5, vol. I, pp. 219-23.



Henry McMahon, the High Commissioner, and Sir Mark Sykes, who was advising the Government in London on Eastern affairs. These officials considered al-Faruqi a representative of the Arab leaders and discussed with him the French demands and their bearing on the claims of the Sharif. They had some justification for considering al-Faruqi as a person of consequence in the counsels of the secret societies, since the Sharif himself invoked his authority in pressing the Arab claims on the British Government.<sup>1</sup> 'Your Honour will have realised,' he wrote to McMahon on January 1, 1916, 'after the arrival of Mohammed (Faroki) Sherif and his interview with you, that all our procedure up to the present was of no personal inclination or the like . . . but that everything was the result of the decisions and desires of our peoples, and that we are but transmitters and executants of such decisions and desires in the position they (our people) have pressed upon us.'<sup>2</sup> Moreover, al-Faruqi's standing was recognised by the other refugees from Syria who were in Cairo, and the Sharif himself proceeded shortly afterwards to appoint him as his Cairo representative. The English authorities then, revealed to al-Faruqi the extent of the French demands and asked his opinion.<sup>3</sup> Al-Faruqi informed the Sharif that he told them that the original demands of the Arab secret societies<sup>4</sup> which embraced the area from Mersina to Basra, could not be modified, but that economic privileges and the right of administrative guidance in the areas claimed by France and England would be conceded to these two Powers. This does not seem to have been his last word. In a conversation with McMahon, which the latter reported to Grey, he expressed the opinion that 'the occupation by France of purely Arab districts of Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Damascus would be opposed by Arabs with force of arms, but with this exception . . . they would accept some modification of the North Western boundaries proposed by the Sherif of Mecca'.<sup>5</sup> And to Sir Mark Sykes, al-Faruqi said at about the same time that the Arabs would agree to Basra and all cultivated land to the south being British

<sup>1</sup> Al-Faruqi's importance in the eyes of the English authorities may be gauged from a passage in G. McMunn and C. Falls, *Official History of the War, Military Operations in Egypt and Palestine from the outbreak of War to June 1917* (1928) pp. 216 ff. The 'complete information' about secret societies in Syria therein referred to was undoubtedly obtained from al-Faruqi.

<sup>2</sup> Correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon . . . and the Sherif Husain of Mecca, July 1915-March 1916, Cmd. 5957 (1939), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Umari, vol. 1, p. 222.

<sup>4</sup> These demands form the basis of the Sharif's first letter to McMahon of July 14, 1915.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in a report, 'British Commitments to King Hussein,' in the Yale Papers (for description of which see p. 214 below) at Yale University (hereafter called Y.P.I.). Also in K. T. Khairallah, *Les Régions Arabes Libérées*, Paris, 1919, pp. 96-7.

territory.<sup>1</sup> These opinions and conditions advanced by al-Faruqi formed the basis of the subsequent Sykes-Picot Agreement, detailed negotiations concerning which began in December 1915,<sup>2</sup> that is, after the so-called McMahon pledge had been issued to the Sharif, and they determined the shape that it eventually took. The division into areas to be annexed or to be protected by England and France respectively, the stipulations about economic activities and administrative supervision were all arranged to fit in with the preferences and desires of the Arab leaders, as far as these could be ascertained. Sir Henry McMahon too, when writing to the Sharif, used the phraseology suggested by the conversations with al-Faruqi.<sup>3</sup> It was later contended by apologists of the Arab Rebellion that al-Faruqi had no authority to speak as he did, and that the English negotiators should not have taken his views into account.<sup>4</sup> This was to reason after the event, but was no doubt all the more convenient that al-Faruqi had been killed in 1920<sup>5</sup> and could not refute such a contention. When the negotiations between the Sharif and McMahon took place, the English side had good reason to think that al-Faruqi was a fit spokesman for those Arab officers and chiefs who were contemplating revolt against the Ottomans; there were no properly constituted or obvious authorities with whom to conduct these negotiations except the Sharif, who had himself witnessed to al-Faruqi's standing. In any case, the essential point is not whether the agreement between the Sharif and McMahon had the consent of the secret societies; the British Government were dealing with the Sharif and not with them; if the secret societies had to be convinced, it was for the Sharif to convince them. The essential point is rather that the Sharif, and those whose support he could obtain, well knew what the claims of England and France in Turkey-in-Asia were, and that nevertheless, they chose to cast their lot with these Powers. The publication by the Bolsheviks of the Sykes-Picot Agreement at the end of 1917 could not have been a great shock to the Sharif or to the other leaders of the Rebellion. Of this there is ample proof, beside the conversations of 1915 between al-Faruqi and the English authorities in Cairo. Muhammad Rashid Rida, a man of stout intelligence, sober understanding and undoubted integrity,

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., 'British Commitments to King Hussein.'

<sup>2</sup> C. Sykes, *Two Studies in Virtue*, 1953, p. 178, where it is stated that the information is based on a memorandum in the papers of Sir Mark Sykes.

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum by the British Delegation at the Palestine Round Table Conference, February 24, 1939, Cmd. 5974 (1939), p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Antonius, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>5</sup> He was killed on October 24, 1920, while travelling on a road near Mosul raided by a pro-Turkish branch of the Shammar tribe. *Report on Iraq Administration, October 1920-March 1922*, p. 3.

who held for so long a prominent position in Muslim thought and politics, was to write in 1921, in his periodical *al-Manar*: 'There came to Cairo in [April-May, 1917] one of the Arab leaders who were with the Amir Faisal. We found him convinced that the King<sup>1</sup> had agreed with the English and the French over their plans for Syria and Iraq. I again heard the same story a month later from another Muslim who was connected with the secret societies. Others who were in Amir Faisal's *entourage* have informed us that they saw a letter from his father to him, mentioning the same thing and giving as a reason for his consent that France would guard the Syrian coast for him till the Arab state could acquire a navy capable of defending it, and that France would pay a stipulated sum to the Arab state every year so long as she occupied the coast.'<sup>2</sup> It was in May 1917 that Sykes and Picot went to Jedda and saw the Sharif. They reiterated to him the arrangement whereby the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire would be, some of them under the supervision of England, and others under that of France.<sup>3</sup> Before their arrival in Jedda they had stopped in Cairo where they assembled the leaders of the Syrian community in Egypt and informed them of the postwar plans of the Powers.<sup>4</sup> Al-Faruqi duly reported the meeting to the Sharif.<sup>5</sup> Any misapprehension on the Sharif's part about this question should have been removed by the language that Sykes held to him in Jedda; for Sykes, so Yale reported, quoting from *The Arab Bulletin*, emphasised the unity of the *Entente*, and declared that whoever was to rule Syria 'an enlightened progressive regime' had to obtain and that certain Syrian districts had, owing to their peculiar character, to remain, in any case, under special tutelage.<sup>6</sup> That the Sharif did not, in fact, labour under a misapprehension is shown by the peremptory manner in which he, time and again, ordered his agent not

<sup>1</sup> The Sharif had had himself proclaimed King of the Arab countries in December 1916.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Manar*, vol. XXII, p. 452. On Rashid Rida and *al-Manar*, see H. Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de . . . Ibn Taymiya*, Cairo, 1939, pp. 547-63.

<sup>3</sup> A few days before the joint visit of Sykes and Picot, Sykes alone went to see Husain, and, according to the account he gave to the Head of the French Military Mission in the Hijaz, he tried to prepare the Sharif for the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. See E. Brémont, *Le Hedjaz dans la Guerre Mondiale*, Paris, 1931, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> Yale's report of November 12, 1917, in Yale Papers at National Central Archives, Washington (hereafter called Y.P.II): 'M. Picot called a meeting of all the prominent Syrians in Egypt, Moslem and Christian . . . and in his speech indicated a French Protectorate over Syria. . . .' Yale goes on to say that Sir Mark Sykes confirmed Picot's speech 'and asserted that a certain part of Syria, which he said he was not at liberty to disclose at that time, would be independent.'

<sup>5</sup> *Al-Umari*, vol. II, pp. 105-6. Al-Faruqi to the Sharif, 4 Rajab 1335/April 27, 1917.

<sup>6</sup> Y.P.I., Report by William Yale, April 15, 1918.

to raise the Syrian question with the British authorities in Cairo, or to agitate against France among the Syrians in Cairo, as al-Faruqi was always trying to do. And when the Syrians in Cairo sent messengers to the Sharif of Mecca and to Faisal, after the publication of the Balfour Declaration in November 1917, to induce him to protest against it, 'They have been made to understand', Yale at the time reported, 'by the Agent of the King of the Hedjaz at Cairo that the Cherif has fully acquiesced in the program of the British as to the Jews of Palestine and the taking of Syria by the French.'<sup>1</sup> It may be that the Sharif thought that he was in no position as yet to contest the bargain which he had just concluded with McMahon, or that he believed that he could not persuade England to take his side against France. In any case, he was always instructing al-Faruqi not to show any overt interest in Syria and to let matters 'take their ordinary course'; he even went so far as to command al-Faruqi, in a telegram of August 11, 1917, not 'to meddle in any way' in matters concerning Syria.<sup>2</sup> It was only in 1918 that a cry went forth from the Hijaz that the Sykes-Picot Agreement was iniquitous, and had been concluded behind the backs of the Arabs. But for this there were peculiar reasons, unconnected with the actual negotiations. If it is not true to say that the Sharif or the Arab leaders were ignorant of the arrangement between England and France before they started their rebellion, it is still less true to allege, as does Liddell Hart in his biography of Colonel Lawrence, that the English officials in Cairo 'were still more cut off from the knowledge of the reality'.<sup>3</sup> The conversations between Sykes, McMahon, Clayton and al-Faruqi in 1915 show that the English officials responsible for policy were aware of the position.<sup>4</sup>

One of the reasons for the disfavour with which the Sykes-Picot Agreement is regarded, is that it was kept secret. It is important to know what exactly this accusation means. The Agreement was certainly kept secret—but not from anybody who could claim to have a say, and whose interests

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.II., Yale's Report of December 10, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Umari, *op. cit.*, vol. II, telegrams and letters of the Sharif, quoted on pp. 76, 106, 131, 134 and 141.

<sup>3</sup> B. H. Liddell Hart, 'T. E. Lawrence' in *Arabia and After*, 1934, p. 70. Lawrence, from whom the information was perhaps derived, himself had at least an idea of the proposed arrangements. 'The French insist upon Syria—which we are conceding them,' he wrote to D. G. Hogarth from Cairo on March 18, 1915. *Letters*, p. 193.

<sup>4</sup> Liddell Hart says also that the Sykes-Picot Agreement became known in May 1917, when the Bolsheviks published the secret treaties. But the Bolsheviks published these treaties only on November 2, 1917. See E. Rossi, *Documenti sull'origine et gli sviluppi della Questione Araba (1875-1944)*, Rome, 1944, p. 67. Sykes and Picot did not go to Jedda in May 1917 in order to explain away inconvenient and scandalous revelations.

the Allies were bound to consider. The Sharif as well as England, France and Russia knew the tenor of the arrangement. The Agreement was kept secret, not because it represented double dealing, but because, as Grey pointed out to the Russian Ambassador when the Constantinople Agreement was being negotiated, Turkey had not yet been defeated. Another reason for secrecy lay in the ambiguity in which both sides in the War were involved; the doctrines that they used to justify their respective causes were incompatible with the kind of settlement proposed in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and indeed with international order as hitherto known in the world. These doctrines could not be the basis of relations between states, as was well realised by English and French statesmen; but the strange Western fatality, made irresistible by America's entry into the War, impelled them to proclaim these doctrines as the basis on which would rest the new and better world they claimed to found; the Sykes-Picot Agreement was, in Balfour's words, 'quite alien to those modern notions of nationality which are enshrined in the Covenant [of the League of Nations] and proclaimed in the declaration. These documents proceed on the assumption that if we supply an aggregate of human beings, more or less homogeneous in language and religion, with a little assistance and a good deal of advice, if we protect them from external aggression and discourage internal violence, they will speedily and spontaneously organise themselves into a democratic state, on modern lines. . . .'<sup>1</sup> Having chosen to take their stand on these paradoxes, the statesmen of the West found, not very surprisingly, when it came to schemes like the Sykes-Picot Agreement, that they had actually cut the ground from under their own feet. Hence a potent reason for secrecy. Another reason touched the Sharif's interest directly. When he rose in rebellion against the Ottoman Sultan, the Government at Constantinople represented him to the Muslims of the world as a traitor to Islam who, out of inordinate ambition, had chosen to conspire with Christian states against the only state in the world which effectively upheld the Muslim faith. It could not be denied that the Sykes-Picot Agreement did, in fact, propose to dismember the Ottoman Empire. To publish it would, therefore, have had an adverse effect on the Sharif's movement. Discretion was, considering the circumstances, in the interest of all concerned, including the Sharif.

The Agreement is also attacked as a cunning and wicked scheme imposing undesirable and tyrannous rule over defenceless populations, and incompatible with McMahon's promises to the Sharif of Mecca. What,

<sup>1</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Series I, vol. IV, p. 343. Memorandum by Balfour of August 11, 1919.

then, were the aims of this Agreement? The Agreement divided Turkey-in-Asia into areas to be occupied by each of the Great Powers concerned, and zones where the influence of each of these Powers was respectively recognised by the others.<sup>1</sup> There was nothing new in the conceptions governing the Agreement; they represented the traditional European solution of the problem arising out of the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. They assumed that England, France, Russia were Great Powers having well known and acknowledged interests in the Ottoman Empire. Unless they abdicated these interests—and there was no reason why they should—these Powers had somehow to reconcile their different ambitions. The Sykes-Picot Agreement was a workman-like device of reconciliation. It took account of the existence of these traditional interests of the Powers. The Sykes-Picot Agreement was an attempt, the only one so far, to try to settle amicably the Ottoman succession. But it is not true that it disregarded the claims of the Sharif. The Sharif had agreed to come into the war on the side of the Allies, and it was only just that he should be rewarded. When the Agreement was signed, the English side, at any rate, was well satisfied that the claims of the Sharif had been recognised. Indeed, the Sykes-Picot Agreement was not always regarded as a contrivance to perpetuate oppression. There was a time when the defenders of Arab Nationalism looked upon it as a charter of Arab liberty. T. E. Lawrence, in his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, takes this view of it: 'The Arab Movement', he wrote, 'would not justify its creation if it did not carry the Arabs into Damascus.'

'... the Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916 between France and England had been drawn by Sykes for this very eventuality: and, to reward it, stipulated the establishment of independent Arab states in Damascus, Aleppo and Mosul, districts which would otherwise fall to the unrestricted control of France.'<sup>2</sup> There is nothing eccentric or strange in this interpretation of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Sir Edward Grey, under whose authority the Agreement was negotiated, says of it in his *Memoirs*, published in 1925, that he 'never regarded this Treaty as entailing any obligation on us except to fulfil a promise to give the Arabs independence.'<sup>3</sup> His view is justifiable, for the Treaty contains a condition, which, had there been an

<sup>1</sup> The text of the Sykes-Picot Agreement is conveniently set out in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Series I, vol. IV, pp. 245-7.

<sup>2</sup> T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 1940 ed., p. 136. In a letter to *The Times* of September 8, 1919, Lawrence stated that he could see no inconsistency or incompatibilities—'and I know nobody who does'—between the McMahon promises and the Sykes-Picot Agreement; *Letters*, p. 281.

<sup>3</sup> Grey, vol. III, p. 213.

intention to defraud and deceive, would not have been present. In his letter of May 16, 1916, accepting the Agreement, Grey informs Cambon that 'His Majesty's Government are ready to accept the arrangement now arrived at provided that the co-operation of the Arabs is secured, and the Arabs fulfil the conditions and obtain the towns of Homs, Hama, Damascus and Aleppo.'<sup>1</sup> This passage is meaningless and unnecessary, unless it is assumed to mean that the interests of the Arabs must be taken into consideration as much as those of France and England. In fact, this sentence of Grey's makes the Arabs a third party to the Sykes-Picot Agreement. How the Arabs came to be a third party, what the ambitions of their leaders were, and what bargain they struck with England remains now to be considered.

II

When the Ottoman Empire entered the War, the English position in Egypt became insecure. The garrison was small, and the Ottomans could threaten and perhaps occupy the Canal Zone. Sir John Maxwell, the Commander-in-Chief in Egypt, persuaded Kitchener that a small expedition to Alexandretta might forestall any move of the Ottomans against Egypt. Such an expedition, Maxwell thought, could cut the railway communications between Turkey and the Fertile Crescent passing through Cilicia and keep occupied, as well, a sizeable contingent of enemy troops. A diversion at Alexandretta was, according to Maxwell, 'the easiest, safest, and most fruitful in results', and 'would not want a very large force'.<sup>2</sup> But, however small the force required, Kitchener considered that it could not be spared from the Western front; '. . . throughout this period he insisted that, until the situation became more clear, nothing must be done to endanger either the British line in France or the security of England from invasion and that for some time to come no troops would be available for any other theatre.'<sup>3</sup> Neither could the force be spared from Egypt, which was then anticipating the Ottoman attack on the Suez Canal.<sup>4</sup> So the plan was, for the time being, shelved and, instead, the Gallipoli expedition, as it were fortuitously and absent-mindedly, began.

On the failure of the Gallipoli expedition, the Alexandretta project was again mooted. It was Sir John Maxwell who, again, proposed the scheme to Kitchener, again describing it as the best means of protecting Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Series I, vol. IV, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> Sir G. Arthur, *Life of Lord Kitchener*, 1920, vol. III, pp. 98-9. Letter from Maxwell to Kitchener, December 4, 1914.

<sup>3</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, vol. I, pp. 48-9; also pp. 53, 56 and 60.

<sup>4</sup> J. Presland, pseud., *Deedes Bey*, 1942, p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, vol. II, 1932, p. 413.

Kitchener himself, who came to Egypt in November 1915, to review the situation arising from the Gallipoli disaster, adopted Maxwell's views which were also shared by McMahon, the High Commissioner in Egypt.<sup>1</sup> But by this time, considerations less immediate and less specific than the urgent prevention of an Ottoman attack on Egypt seemed to be present. It was argued now that the evacuation of Gallipoli would diminish the standing of the Allies in the East, that it would encourage the Ottomans in the Mesopotamian campaign, and endanger the negotiations with the Sharif of Mecca, actively pursued since July 1915. These were the reasons that made Kitchener, Maxwell and McMahon insist that the second Alexandretta scheme was necessary to the defence of Egypt. Maxwell and McMahon were prepared to acquiesce in the evacuation of the Gallipoli force 'provided a landing could *first* be made at Ayas Bay'. And on Kitchener's arrival in Egypt, his private secretary telegraphed to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in London, that the scheme 'politically . . . meets the requirements of our advance in Mesopotamia and the successful development of the Arab question.'<sup>2</sup> The General Staff in London were dubious of the wisdom of a landing in Alexandretta as a means of defending Egypt. The experience of the previous February, when the Ottoman troops tried to attack the Suez Canal, inclined them to view with equanimity the repetition of an undertaking so costly and so futile. On the other hand, they argued, the Alexandretta expedition would demand 100,000 men who could be better employed fighting 'the one enemy whose overthrow can bring this war to a successful conclusion—Germany.' They ended by saying that operations in Alexandretta 'might entail the forcing of a landing against considerable opposition, and in any case, they would probably involve us in a fight with larger Turkish forces than are at all likely to be able to reach the Canal. In the case of failure our withdrawal would be very difficult, while the enemy, if defeated, would retire with comparative ease.'<sup>3</sup> But this was not how Kitchener looked at the matter. He was, as the historian of the Gallipoli expedition says, 'obsessed'<sup>4</sup> with a landing at Alexandretta, and he had convinced himself that if the landing was not made, all manner of misfortune would befall the Allies. So, he 'categorically' countered the arguments of the General Staff as follows: 'The political situation in the East in our opinion so

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415. Telegram of November 11, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Moberly, vol. II, 1924, appendix VIII, 'The Present and Prospective Situation in Syria and Mesopotamia,' p. 471.

<sup>4</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, vol. II, p. 416. See an endorsement of this judgement in Poincaré, vol. VII, pp. 288-9 and 310.



seriously affects purely military considerations as to outweigh those military disadvantages which might otherwise carry weight. The effect in the East of the Turkish army being allowed to carry out, unopposed and unmolested, the declared intentions of Germany combined with a possible evacuation of our positions in Gallipoli (which would be equivalent to a serious defeat) will be enormous, and will have far-reaching results by throwing the Arabs into German hands and thus uniting them against us, endangering French as well as British possessions.

' . . . In Egypt we should have to face certain hostility all along the Western frontier which would extend to Tunis, Algiers and Morocco; serious unrest and disturbances throughout Egypt and the Sudan endangering our internal communications as well as the closing of the Canal for a prolonged period. Reliance on the defence of Egypt in Egypt fore-shadows, in our opinion, a withdrawal from it and the Sudan within a measurable time, with results so far-reaching both for ourselves and France as possibly to allow the Germans to attain their object and thus jeopardise the campaign in Europe by the withdrawal of larger forces than can be afforded.'<sup>1</sup>

The tone of this telegram, urgent and apocalyptic, is characteristic of Kitchener when balked in the attainment of his object. The landing at Alexandretta had been, in the sober eye of its originator, Maxwell, first a convenient way of hindering an Ottoman attack on Egypt, and then, after the failure at Gallipoli, chiefly a means of preventing loss of prestige in the East, consequent on this failure; the General Staff as soberly doubted whether the anticipated results justified the cost of the expedition. Kitchener then intervened, and the landing at Alexandretta became the crucial operation of the War, on which the fate of England and France seemed almost to hinge. This is, of course, quite absurd; for the operation, at best, would have had but secondary significance, and there is no obvious, overwhelming reason why it should have succeeded, or why the wonderful results anticipated from it should have materialised.

The balance of military opinion was, then, against a landing at Alexandretta. The arguments of the General Staff were reinforced by objections from the French Government. When the expedition was proposed, the Sykes-Picot Agreement had not yet been concluded, and the French regarded the area of operations as within their sphere of interest. The French Cabinet was 'unanimous in thinking that there would be the greatest objections to allowing England to undertake the expedition proposed by Kitchener.'<sup>2</sup> The French military attaché in London represented

<sup>1</sup> Sir G. Arthur, vol. III, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> Poincaré, vol. VII, p. 248.

that an agreement should be reached between England and France prior to the expedition and that 'the greater part of the task should be entrusted to French troops and the French Generals commanding them.'<sup>1</sup> The French must have considered this move justified by an understanding dating from January 27, 1915, between Augagneur and Churchill providing that 'if ever the question of military operations in Syria and Cilicia arose, a French Admiral would have to command the Anglo-French naval forces,' and that 'if a landing at Alexandretta were contemplated, the operations would be, as much as possible, concerted between the two governments, but without prejudice to the authority of the French Command.'<sup>2</sup> This French *démarche* of November 1915, did not, it has to be remarked, by itself, constitute an insuperable obstacle to the operation. Had the British Government been convinced of the necessity of the landing, the French would surely have been guaranteed, as they were to be a few months later in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the recognition of their interests in the Levant. Kitchener himself, when he heard of the French objections, was quite willing to propose, in order to overcome them, that England should 'follow the precedent of Constantinople being awarded to Russia, and allot Syria with suitable boundaries to France after the War.'<sup>3</sup> It was not primarily anxiety about its position in Syria that made the French Government oppose the Alexandretta expedition. The French Government was, for a number of reasons, both internal<sup>4</sup> and external, strongly in favour of an alternative landing at Salonica and wanted the British troops, being evacuated from Gallipoli, to go there. The French attitude, joined to the opposition of the General Staff, led to the final abandonment of the Alexandretta scheme.

The circumstances of the War had led to the Dardanelles expedition, the Alexandretta scheme and to the Constantinople and the Sykes-Picot Agreements, which last were attempts to settle political questions raised by Allied operations against the Ottoman Empire. These same circumstances led the English to approach the Sharif of Mecca, in order to induce him to rebel against the Ottoman Sultan and thus to add further to the preoccupations of the Ottoman Government and to weaken its powers of attack. It seems to have been Kitchener's idea to approach the Sharif. Kitchener had been Consul-General in Egypt from September 1911 till the outbreak of War, and while there, he showed some interest in the

<sup>1</sup> The French military attaché's note is cited in Liddell Hart, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Poincaré, vol. VII, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur, vol. III, p. 193.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, R. Brett, Viscount Esher, *Letters and Journals*, vol. III, 1938, p. 156. See also Pingaud, vol. II, pp. 96-7, 105-6 and 135-7.

Arab question. Cairo was at that time a great centre of immigrants from Syria, both Christian and Muslim, who were prominent in journalism and in the Civil Service. Many of these immigrants were under the influence of Liberal and Nationalist ideas which they could disseminate from Cairo, where they were immune from Ottoman control, into all parts of the Middle East; they founded societies to agitate for the autonomy of the Arab areas of the Empire, and perhaps to carry on subversive activities against the Ottoman Government. The Residency could not have been ignorant of the views and activities of these immigrants. It is also most probable that there were friendly relations between some of its members and these Syrians,<sup>1</sup> for immediately the War broke out in Europe, and before the Ottoman Empire had been drawn into it, Storrs, the Oriental Secretary, approached the leaders of the Decentralisation Party in Cairo, the most important of the Syrian societies there, 'asking them their plans in the event of Turkey entering the War, and what would be their attitude if the Allies worked for the independence of the Arab countries; whether the Arabs could help them, and whether they would be able to bear the burden of their independence.'<sup>2</sup> While Kitchener was Consul-General in Egypt, two events occurred which must have drawn his attention to the potentialities of the Arab question. The first of these events was the trial of Aziz Ali al-Misri. This Egyptian, an officer in the Ottoman service, had, at the beginning of 1914, been arrested in Constantinople, charged with treason, and condemned to death. It was alleged by him and his friends that the personal animosity of Enver Pasha had led to such treatment. There was, however, a suspicion of something else being involved, as Sir Louis Mallet, then Ambassador at Constantinople, explained to Sir Edward Grey: '... it is clear from what I have since learned from other sources,' he wrote on February 24, 1914, 'that the matter is really a political one, for there is no doubt that Aziz Ali Bey has been one of the leading spirits in a group of Young Arabs, officers and others, who are dissatisfied with the present Turkish Government. It is difficult to gauge the importance of this group, but it has come to my knowledge that some

<sup>1</sup> On the position of the Syrians in the Government of Egypt, see Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, 1908, vol. II, pp. 213-16. W. S. Blunt reports a piece of gossip of 1904 (*My Diaries*, vol. II, 1920, p. 97) to the effect that Cromer 'is largely under the influence of his Secretary, Boyle, who in his turn, is under the influence of the Nimr Brothers, the Syrian editors of the Mokattam newspaper, who provide him with the bulk of his information on native affairs.' Anything of Blunt's relating to Cromer must be treated with extreme caution, and the remark may be considered as merely indicative of the position of the Syrians in Egypt under British rule.

<sup>2</sup> Amin Sa'id, *Al-Thawra al-Arabiyya al-Kubra* (*The Great Arab Revolt*), Cairo, 1934, vol. I, pp. 128-9.

at least of them are identified with more or less definite schemes for organising a movement which would aim at releasing the whole region from Mosul to the Persian Gulf from Turkish domination. . . .<sup>1</sup> On the arrest of Aziz Ali, Kitchener was approached by his relatives and friends and asked to use the influence of England on behalf of the accused man. Kitchener wrote, it would seem, more than once,<sup>2</sup> to the British Ambassador at Constantinople, asking him to make representations to the Ottoman Government in favour of Aziz Ali. He explained the reason of this step, and the explanation comes strangely from so masterful a character: 'Egyptian public opinion has been genuinely and sincerely aroused by the arrest and trial of this officer,' he told Grey on April 4, 1914, 'and so far from taking the initiative in pressing the matter at Constantinople, I have had some difficulty in calming the resentment caused by the proceedings of the Turkish Government.'<sup>3</sup>

The other event which drew Kitchener's attention to the Arabs was his meeting with Abdullah the son of the Sharif of Mecca in Cairo, also at the beginning of 1914. Abdullah asked him if England could extend help to the Sharif in case he was involved in difficulties with Constantinople, or if he could count on her benevolence if these difficulties led him to revolt.<sup>4</sup> Kitchener, of course, could not then but dismiss such an approach, and any other attitude would not, indeed, have been approved by the Government in London. But however correct his behaviour was on that, and on a subsequent occasion, before the outbreak of war, he seems to have entertained second thoughts on the question, and to have hinted at them in a letter to Grey: 'I quite agree with Sir Louis Mallet in thinking that great care will have to be taken in dealing with the Arab question, so as not to wound Turkish susceptibilities and arouse their suspicion. At the same time,' he wrote, 'we cannot afford to lose sight of the interest which Great Britain must always take in the Holy Places, owing to the annual pilgrimage. . . . The welfare and indeed safety of these pilgrims is intimately bound up with the maintenance of order in the districts in question, and of a good relationship between Turks and Arabs whose animosity has indeed been roused by the recent Turkish policy of centralisation adopted during the last few years and more especially by the proposal to push forward railway communications which would cause great pecuniary loss to the Arabs who live on their camel hire.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gooch and Temperley, vol. X, part II, pp. 833-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 834.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 831.

<sup>4</sup> Gooch and Temperley, vol. X, part II, p. 827. Kitchener to Grey, February 6, 1914.

<sup>5</sup> Gooch and Temperley, vol. X, part II, p. 830. Kitchener to Grey, April 4, 1914.

Shortly after war broke out in Europe, on September 24, 1914, Kitchener, then instructed the Residency in Cairo to sound the Sharif and to find whether he would adopt a friendly attitude to England in case the Ottoman Government joined the Central Powers.<sup>1</sup> Abdullah replied, indicating the conditions to secure the friendliness of the Sharif: 'So long as she protects the rights of our country and the rights of the person of His Highness, our present Emir and Lord, and the rights of his Emirate, and its independence, in all respects, without any exceptions or restrictions, and so long as it supports us against foreign aggression and in particular against the Ottomans, especially if they wish to set up anyone else as Emir with the intention of causing internal dissension—their principle of government—and provided that the Government of Great Britain would guarantee these fundamental principles, clearly and in writing. This guarantee we expect to receive at the first opportunity.'<sup>2</sup> This cautious and adroit reply represents no departure from the views with which Abdullah had come to Kitchener earlier in the year. His aim and his father's was an essentially limited one, namely, to secure to their branch of the Hashemite clan the perpetual Amirate of Mecca, with as much independence as could be wrested from the Ottoman overlord. This had been the object of the approach to Kitchener in February 1914, when the Sharif had become anxious for his prerogatives, the Young Turks having sent a new military Governor to the Hijaz who seemed intent on gathering authority in his own hands.<sup>3</sup> According to T. E. Lawrence, Abdullah had then in mind 'a plan of peaceful insurrection for Hejaz . . . and had dated it provisionally for 1915. He had meant to call out the tribes during the feast and lay hold of the pilgrims. . . . The Porte, powerless to deal with Hejaz militarily, would either have made concessions to the Sherif or have confessed its powerlessness to foreign states. In the latter event, Abdullah would have approached them direct, ready to meet their demands in return for a guarantee of immunity from Turkey.'<sup>4</sup> Therefore, when Kitchener ap-

<sup>1</sup> King Abdullah's *Memoirs*, 1950, give what purports to be the text of Kitchener's first message. Kitchener is made to say: 'If you (Abdullah) and His Highness your father still favour a movement such as would lead to the full independence of the Arabs, Great Britain is prepared to assist such a movement by all the means in her power' (pp. 132-3). But neither Kitchener in his account to Grey of his conversations with Abdullah, nor Abdullah in his account of these conversations, as supplied by Antonius to the editors of the *British Documents on the Origins of the War* (vol. X, part II, pp. 831-2) make any mention of 'the full independence of the Arabs' as having been discussed previously, so that the text of Kitchener's first message must remain for the moment doubtful.

<sup>2</sup> Y.P.I., 'British Commitments to King Hussein.'

<sup>3</sup> Amin Sa'id, vol. I, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars* . . . , p. 74.

proached the Sharif in September 1914, Abdullah thought that there was an opportunity of realising this long-standing ambition and replied to Kitchener in this sense.

The Sharif's anxiety, as appeared from his message to Kitchener, to obtain security of tenure in Mecca, dates from the time of his appointment to the Sharifate in 1908. The Sharif of Mecca came from the Hashemite clan of Quraish, the tribe of the Prophet; but there has always been intense rivalry between two houses within the clan, the Zaidis and the Aunis, to the second of which the Sharif Husain belonged. The Sharifate was an appointment in the gift of the Ottoman Sultan, who was at liberty to appoint the Sharif from either of the two houses. The anxiety of a Sharif from either house would be to perpetuate the office in his own descendants.<sup>1</sup> As soon as Husain was appointed to the Sherifate of Mecca, he began to consolidate his position. On the one hand, he sent armed expeditions in order to subdue the Arab tribes and principalities abutting on the Hijaz in the name of the Ottoman Government; and on the other, he worked to strengthen his own position in the Hijaz against the central authorities. This he could do, since, to start with, the central government did not assert a meticulous control, the valis were frequently changed, and most of them being men of no great ability. By 1912, the Sharif's authority in Mecca was secure and the vali was powerless there. 'When, in the summer of that year [1912], three Indians were found murdered in the Medina district, the British Consul was assured that the guilty parties were emissaries of the Grand Sharif, who had been ordered by the Government to withdraw his son and his Bedouins from Asir [which he was trying to subdue in the name of the Sultan] and who, so the informant said, was deliberately seeking to create disturbance in the Medina district so as to convince the Government of the necessity of bringing it also under his authority. . . .'<sup>2</sup> When, therefore, the Young Turk Government sent to the Hijaz a strong vali, the Sharif looked round for a way in which to frustrate him and sent his son Abdullah to Kitchener in February 1914. So far from being a leader of the Arabs or the Muslims at the outbreak of the War, the Sharif, as the writer of the Memorandum above mentioned says, had 'to live down a past in which, while working for his own aggrandizement, he has posed very definitely as the representative of the Central Government.' So well-known was the record of the Sharif in the Muslim

<sup>1</sup> For the last stages of the rivalry between the Zaidis and the Aunis see G. M. S. Stitt, *A Prince of Arabia*, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> Gooch and Temperley, vol. X, part II, p. 829. 'Memorandum on the position of the Grand Sheriff of Mecca' enclosed with a dispatch from Sir L. Mallet, March 18, 1914.

world that, when he announced his rebellion in June 1916, Rashid Rida, the editor of *al-Manar*, who was then the Sharif's partisan, felt it necessary to provide an explanation and a palliation of the Sharif's past; he wrote an article in his periodical, in the form of a dialogue between himself and a Theologian discussing the advantages and the disadvantages to Islam and the Arabs, of the Sharif's movement. The Theologian asks: 'If the Sharif knew what the Committee of Union and Progress held in store for the Arabs in general, and for him and his house in particular, why was he then the partisan of the Committee, to such an extent that he made war on al-Idrissi [the Imam of Asir] in order to uphold their authority, and was on the point of fighting Ibn Sa'ud, the Amir of Najd, in the same cause?' Rashid Rida answers: 'I do not know when he [the Sharif] came to know, beyond doubt [the true state of affairs]. To start with, he hoped well from the Committee of Union and Progress, so much so that some leaders of the Arab Movement accused him of being a partisan of the Committee, and of detesting al-Idrissi's authority in Asir. It is reported that he and those of his house say that they did not give their support to the actions of the Committee of Union and Progress as such, but to the decisions of the State. They were of the opinion that the State should be upheld, even though it tyrannised over the Arabs and over other groups; this, they thought, was preferable to opposition even if secret, lest opposition end in disunion which would ruin both Arabs and Turks. . . . Such opinions and such conduct did not gain the entire approval of the Arab political parties; these parties rather thought that the Sharif, the Amir of Mecca had to be loyal to the State and to support it only in executive matters, but not where the fighting of other Arabs was in question; as for matters which were still under discussion and not yet in the province of the executive, his followers should, so these parties contended, have opposed the Committee when its racial intolerance and its persecution of the Arabs became clear; whereas his son [Abdullah], the Deputy for Mecca [in the Ottoman Parliament] together with the other Hijaz deputies and with his [Husain's] brother, the Sharif Nasir, the Senator, were all partisans of the Committee. . . .' Rashid Rida goes on to say that the Sharif has now seen the error of his past ways and is convinced that he has been deceived by the Committee.<sup>1</sup>

Such then were the ambitions, the situation and the reputation<sup>2</sup> of the

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Manar*, vol. XIX, pp. 151-2.

<sup>2</sup> On the Sharif's reputation see further Ameen Rihani, *Around the Coasts of Arabia*, 1930, pp. 106-7, and the same writer's *Tarikh Najd al-Hadith wa Mulhaqatihi* (*The History of Modern Najd and its Dependencies*), Beirut, 1928, pp. 171-5: 'There was, truth to say, in those days [1911] no enmity between Husain and Ibn Sa'ud which

man whom Kitchener had approached at the outbreak of war with Germany. The reply he had received was encouraging enough to warrant a further step when the Young Turks finally joined the conflict against the Allies. On October 31, 1914, the day on which the Ottomans joined the War, Kitchener sent a further message to Abdullah which promised that if the 'Arab nation' assisted England in the war, England would see to it that Arabia would not be molested. Kitchener also added:

'It may be that an Arab of true race will assume the Khalifate at Mecca or Medina and so good may come by the help of God out of all the evil that is now occurring.'<sup>1</sup> This message of Kitchener's was clearly reiterated in McMahon's letter to the Sharif of August 30, 1915: 'To this intent we confirm to you the terms of Lord Kitchener's message which reached you by the hand of Ali Effendi, and in which was stated clearly our desire for the independence of Arabia, and its inhabitants, together with our approval of the Khalifate when it should be proclaimed. We declare once more that His Majesty's Government would welcome the resumption of the Khalifate by an Arab of true race.'<sup>2</sup> Kitchener's message, with its ambiguous hint of the caliphate, a far more splendid prospect than a mere autonomy at Mecca, was to have a decisive importance. Kitchener was naturally anxious to carry on the war against the Ottomans as effectively as he could, and would use any means towards this end. His direct military mind would consider solely the end in view and seek the shortest way of reaching it. The Sharif of Mecca could introduce disorder within the Ottoman Empire, and if the temptation of the caliphate induced him to put his position and his resources at the side of the Allies, then Kitchener would certainly dangle the caliphate before the Sharif of Mecca. That was probably all, as far as Kitchener was concerned. But what, in any case, did he understand by the caliphate? The caliphate in Sunni Muslim dogma is the only legitimate political institution of Islam; the caliph is the master of the Muslim community, who holds temporal sway over all Muslims, who

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might lead to a war or even to a razzia. But the Sharif was loyal to the Committee of Union and Progress, and was trying to gain their confidence with the object of perpetuating the Sharifate in himself and his sons. The Government at Constantinople had lost confidence in the house of Ibn Rashid (the lord of Ha'il) owing to the numerous political assassinations in this family, and they turned to the Sharif Husain in the hope that he would at least obtain from Ibn Sa'ud his goodwill towards them. And no doubt the Sharif promised the Government this and more.' Rihani goes on to describe the war waged by the Sharif on Ibn Sa'ud in 1912 to persuade him to recognise Ottoman sovereignty.

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., 'British Commitments to King Hussein.'

<sup>2</sup> Correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon and the Sherif Hussein of Mecca, Cmd. 5957 (1939), p. 4.



protects the religion, enlarges the bounds of the Muslim dominion and wages war on unbelievers and heretics. He is the depository of the political and military power of the Muslim community, the Sovereign of all Muslims. A potentate such as the caliph of Muslim dogma is above being sponsored or 'approved' by any other Power, much less a Christian Power. This would be an absurdity and a blasphemy. It is obvious that when Kitchener hinted at the caliphate being assumed by an 'Arab of true race' he did not have such a caliphate in mind, but something quite different. The caliphate he had in mind was a kind of spiritual headship of the Muslim world, a papacy of Islam, and the 'Arab of true race' who was to be caliph in Mecca or Medina, was to be a supreme theological and ecclesiastical authority for Muslims, an arbiter of the dogma, reigning over the Holy Places, the recipient of spiritual veneration, but certainly not of temporal allegiance. It was a widely held misconception in Europe that such, in fact, was the nature and function of the caliphate,<sup>1</sup> so much so that W. S. Blunt, for instance, could write about it in this manner: 'On the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, whenever that event shall occur, the role of England in regard to Islam seems plainly marked out. The Caliphate—no longer an empire, but still an independent sovereignty—must be taken under British protection, and publicly guaranteed its political existence, undisturbed by further aggression from Europe.'<sup>2</sup> Some such idea must have been in Kitchener's mind; nor would it be far-fetched to ascribe it to him, for this fictional caliphate, he must have known, had been officially tolerated in India, where Muslims were allowed to pray publicly for the Ottoman Sultan as the spiritual head of the Muslims. But this was, as D. G. Hogarth was to point out in a paper of 1917 in *The Arab Bulletin*, 'a sturdy, conscious fiction;' the fact is, he went on to say, 'that the caliphate in its institution was both temporal and spiritual, and has never since been divorced from temporal dominion held either by the caliph himself or by some great Moslem sovereign of which he was the *alter ego*: and that it is associated by Sunnis, not only with temporal dominion actually enjoyed by the caliph, but with a right and an aspiration to temporal dominion over all Moslems in the fulness of time.'<sup>3</sup> Such a consummation was very far indeed from the wishes of the British Government. For, beside the hint about the caliphate, the utmost that

<sup>1</sup> See T. W. Arnold, *The Caliphate*, 1924, pp. 146-7, 170-1, 173 and 189-200, where he attempts to explain the true nature of the caliphate, to trace the European misconceptions concerning it, and to correct these misconceptions.

<sup>2</sup> W. S. Blunt, *The Future of Islam*, 1882, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> D. G. Hogarth, 'Arabia: The Next Caliphate', *Arab Bulletin*, No. 49, April 30, 1917.

Kitchener could offer specifically and concretely in his message, was that England would take care that nobody would molest Arabia, and furnish help if such a threat materialised. Cairo, transmitting Kitchener's message, reaffirmed England's intention, should the Sharif join her side, of guaranteeing 'the independence, rights and privileges' of the Sharif against the Ottomans. But to this definite and circumscribed offer an ambiguity was again tacked, for Cairo's additional message ended by saying that while in the past England had 'defended' Islam in the person of the Turks, it would now do so in that of the 'noble Arabs'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly when McMahon in his letter to the Sharif of August 30, 1915, reiterated Kitchener's message, he spoke of England's 'desire for the independence of Arabia and its inhabitants *together* with our approval of the Caliphate when it should be proclaimed.'<sup>2</sup>

The caution of the British Government regarding territorial commitments was useless. Now that the dream of the caliphate held the Sharif, he had quite other views about his future; no longer for him a perpetual Amirate in Mecca confirmed to his family, or the government of the whole of the Hijaz or even of Arabia. Now the possibility began to allure of the Sharif superseding the Ottoman Sultan in the government of the Empire, of becoming the Caliph, the Sovereign of all the Muslims with real and extensive power, not Kitchener's caliph, a glorified theologian. He did not pause to think—or if he did, the thought did not give him pause—that a true caliph attains his eminence by the might of his arm and the strength of his will, and not by the 'approval' of a Christian Power whom the necessities of war had compelled to approach him with promises and temptations. So he began to look round him to see how he might more securely grasp the opportunity which had so miraculously come in search of him. He approached other potentates in Arabia and dispatched his son Faisal to Syria to discover whether there were enough partisans to embrace his cause. And when he unfolded the banner of his revolt in June 1916 he did not, in the manifesto which he directed to the Muslim world on that occasion,<sup>3</sup> speak, as might be expected, of the grievances of the Arab nation oppressed by the Turkish tyrants. But

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., 'British Commitments to King Hussein.'

<sup>2</sup> My italics. Cmd. 5957 (1939), p. 4. Antonius, who published in his *Arab Awakening* a translation from the Arabic of the text of McMahon's correspondence with the Sharif before the official publication of the letters in 1939, has (pp. 416-17) 'Arab countries' instead of the 'Arabia' of the official text as reproduced above—a material difference. But 'Arabia' must be the correct version, since the official text was scrutinised and approved by a committee of which Antonius himself was a member.

<sup>3</sup> Amin Sa'id, vol. I, pp. 149-57.

he, the Young Turks' man, the upholder for six years, in the face of turbulent tribe and fissiparous principality, of the Young Turk Government, raised his voice to condemn these atheistic, impious, immoral Young Turks who had brought the caliphate low and imperilled the Muslim estate, who had, by their foolishness and improvidence, lost many a province to the Sultan and who had laid sacrilegious hands at last even on the Sultan's prerogatives. If he ventured to mention the grievances of the Arabs, it was only to add another one to the long list of the misdeeds committed by the Young Turks, one which also proceeded from their arrogant and impious disregard of Islam, for who were the Arabs but the people of the Prophet, in whose language the Quran had been sent, and had not the Prophet himself said 'If the Arabs are dishonoured, Islam itself is dishonoured'?<sup>1</sup> He had, no doubt, in any case, his previous reputation to live down, and his fulminations against the Young Turks also served this purpose.<sup>2</sup> Kitchener's magic word worked on the Sharif prodigiously. A few months after his revolt, in December 1916, he had himself proclaimed King of the Arabs. When the Allies protested that they were not consulted about this step, the Sharif wrote to his agent in Cairo, al-Faruqi: 'You will present my compliments to any who might, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, discuss with you our new title, and you will remind them of the way in which, at the start of our negotiations, the title of the Arab Caliphate was devolved on me. . . .'<sup>3</sup> On another occasion the Sharif expressed his displeasure with England for her treaties with other Chiefs of the Arabian Peninsula: 'When we met the [British] Agent [at Jedda], he informed me that England had signed treaties with Ibn Sa'ud and al-Idrisi. I did not want to pursue the subject with him but hoped to elucidate the matter from His Excellency the Viceroy the High Commissioner in Egypt. If this is true, even regardless of the fact that such treaties contradict the basis of our understanding, the results cannot but erect obstacles

<sup>1</sup> This Hadith—a saying in the Muslim tradition attributed to the Prophet Muhammad—is quoted by the Sharif in his manifesto; *ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> His son, Abdullah, thirty years later was to write in his *Memoirs* (p. 57) this passage about the caliphate: 'The real reason, however, for the downfall of the Ottoman Dynasty was the declaration of the Republic in Turkey by Mustapha Kemal Pasha. A republican revolution had been the goal of Turkish youth ever since the days of Midhat Pasha, but he forgot that as soon as the caliphate fell, the Arabs would naturally detach themselves from the Empire. It is true that the Turks are today stronger than before, better organised and more progressive, but where is the fame and influence they once had, when their Sultan was Commander of the Faithful?' A strange question from an accessory to the destruction of the caliphate; but the echoes of old apologies die hard.

<sup>3</sup> Amin Sa'id, vol. I, p. 296.

in front of me and in front of the high purpose which is known to Britain, and to destroy the practical fruits [of this high purpose] for which our movement [was inaugurated], and this without any real necessity.<sup>1</sup> When D. G. Hogarth saw the Sharif at the beginning of 1918 his impression was that the Sharif still held to his ambitions: 'It is obvious,' he wrote, 'that the King regards Arab Unity as synonymous with his own kingship, and . . . as a vain phrase unless so regarded.'<sup>2</sup> The Sharif was indeed determined to receive the caliphate from whoever would offer it to him. In his negotiations with the Ottoman Government after he joined the Allies, the Sharif, it seems, did demand the caliphate from them as the price of peace. Such would be the implication of a letter dated May 24, 1918, from von Papen, who was attached to the Ottoman army in Syria, to Bernstorff, the German Ambassador at Constantinople: 'Djemal Pasha my Army Commander, like Tassim Bey, is convinced that an understanding could be reached even without a settlement of the caliphate question. It would be enough to provide the Sharif with an autonomous position in Mecca and Medina.'<sup>3</sup>

Starting with these anticipations and expectations, the Sharif could not avoid, in the end, bitter disappointment; but his bitterness did not stem from any betrayal by England or the Allies of territorial promises, or a diminution of the amount of independence to be allowed to him; is it not rather that Kitchener's hint had inspired in him hopes inevitably doomed to betrayal? For, when all is said and done, what did McMahon promise exactly, and were his promises so patently clear that their breach could be immediately and clearly denounced? If the McMahon-Husain correspondence is searched for England's territorial promises to the Sharif<sup>4</sup> it will be found that they amount, in the end, to much the same thing as what al-Faruqi asked for in his conversations with McMahon and claimed to be the irreducible minimum of Arab demands, and what was in fact guaranteed to the Arabs in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, namely the

<sup>1</sup> Al-Umari, vol. II, pp. 100-1. The Sharif to al-Faruqi 19 Jamada al-Awwal, 1335H/March 4, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> Statements made on behalf of His Majesty's Government during the year 1918 in regard to the future status of certain parts of the Ottoman Empire, Cmd. 5964 (1939), pp. 4-5. Hogarth's notes on his conversations with the Sharif, January 4, 1918.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of Count Bernstorff*, 1936, p. 179. A report in the *Milner Papers*, of October 1917, on the *Panturanian movement*, signed A. J. T[oynebee?] mentions that the Young Turks had offered autonomy to the Sharif in the Hijaz, but would not entertain his pretensions to the caliphate. Both in 1915, and in 1916, just before he revolted, the Sharif had demanded of the Ottoman government, as the price of his help, that the Hijaz be made autonomous and its government hereditary to his family; see Amin Sa'id, vol. I, pp. 106 and 111.

<sup>4</sup> They are contained in McMahon's letter to the Sharif of October 24, 1915.

districts of Hama, Homs, Aleppo and Damascus. Between the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the promises of McMahon, there could be and there was no incompatibility. Sir Mark Sykes, as the British Government pointed out in 1939, 'must clearly have negotiated the [Sykes-Picot] agreement in the belief that the reservations in the pledge of October 24, 1915, [from McMahon to the Sharif] justified his concluding an agreement in the form which it eventually assumed.'<sup>1</sup> The subtle and exact Hogarth has precisely and compendiously set down in one sentence the whole of McMahon's commitment to the Sharif. 'While it explicitly ruled out of negotiations all the Turkish-speaking districts which Husain had claimed as Arab, and all Arab societies with whose chiefs we already had treaties—while further, it reserved to French discretion any assurance about the independence of the Syrian littoral, or the freedom from tutelage of the interior, i.e. the districts of the four towns, Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo—while by reserving other Arab regions in which France might have peculiar interests, it left Mosul, and even, perhaps, Palestine, in doubt—while, finally, it stated expressly that no guarantee for the unconditional delivery of either Lower or Upper Iraq to the Arabs could be given by us;—in spite of all these reservations it recognised an Arab title to almost all the vast territories which Husain had claimed, including Mesopotamia, subject only to limiting but not annulling conditions.'<sup>2</sup> Such a pledge is hardly worth the denunciations and accusations which its alleged non-fulfilment drew after the War. The cause of these accusations was something quite other; and the failure of the Sharif's ambition to become caliph, or at least king of the Arab countries had a part in it; an ambition which, to quote Hogarth's lucid comment, 'we [the English] never encouraged him to hold, but did not sufficiently discourage him from holding.'<sup>3</sup>

The seed had been sown, and the ambition implanted in the Sharif's soul. But it behoved him to move cautiously, for it was by no means clear, at the end of 1914 and the beginning of 1915, that an insurrection against the Ottoman Power would be in any way successful, or that it would find supporters inside the Empire. 'January 1915,' remarks a writer in the *Arab Bulletin*, 'was a critical month in the Near East. The War had well begun for the Ottomans, and preparations for the great attack on the Canal were in full swing. Everybody believed it would be successful, and that it meant the beginning of a new epoch in Islam. Pan-Islamic agents

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 5974 (1939), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> H. W. V. Temperley, ed., *History of the Peace Conference*, vol. VI, 1924, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, vol. X, 1923, p. 63.

from Shaikh Shawish and Oppenheim, down to the hedge-priests of Gaza were swarming in Damascus, and preaching in all the mosques and villages of Syria. The Pan-Arab party had been taken by surprise, and almost lost its organisation in the current. The Sanjak<sup>1</sup> was being displayed, and the Jihad growing in acceptability.<sup>2</sup> To Kitchener's second message the Sharif, therefore, sent an answer which committed him to 'a policy of avowed alliance with England,' but in which he pointed out that he was unable for the time being to take overt action against the Ottoman Government.<sup>3</sup> To this Government, who had been pressing him to proclaim the Holy War against the Allies and to take active part in the operations against Egypt, he returned evasive answers and 'while paying lip-service to the agitation, stood aloof.'<sup>4</sup> To strengthen his hand against them, he at the same time wrote to his rival Ibn Sa'ud, the Amir of Najd, who had been long at variance with the Ottoman Government and who entertained friendly relations with the Government of India, and asked him what attitude they should both adopt to the demands of the Porte. Ibn Sa'ud communicated the Sharif's message to Captain Shakespear, an officer of the Indian Political Service at his court; 'I believed,' wrote Shakespear to the British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf on January 19, 1915, (and Bin Saud concurred in this) 'that in Mecca and Medina the Sherif's word probably carried far more weight than that of the local Turkish authorities. Therefore it behoved the Sherif to use his best influence for peace, if he desired the benevolence or countenance of His Majesty's Government. . . . It seemed to me, therefore, advisable for the Sherif in his own interests to continue to temporize with the Turks while Bin Saud would be further assisting His Majesty's Government and improving his own chances of a satisfactory arrangement with them if he advised him accordingly.'<sup>5</sup>

At the same time the Sharif sent his son Faisal to Syria and Constantinople to spy out the land and to discover what support to expect from the Arab Nationalists. Faisal arrived in Damascus in March 1915.<sup>6</sup> Before he left Mecca, his father had received, at the end of January, an emissary from Arab officers in the Ottoman army in Syria proposing rebellion and asking whether he would lead it.<sup>7</sup> These discontented officers had, for some time before the outbreak of war, been looking for a magnate or a potentate in the Arab-speaking areas of the Ottoman Empire who would take up the

<sup>1</sup> The standard of the Prophet, displayed on the proclamation of a Holy War.

<sup>2</sup> *Arab Bulletin*, no. 25, October 7, 1916.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> Antonius, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> Antonius, p. 134.

<sup>6</sup> *Arab Bulletin*, no. 25.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

cause of Arab nationalism and whose territory would form the nucleus of a future Arab state. After Aziz Ali's trial, in April 1914, for instance, Nuri al-Sa'id, then a lieutenant in the Ottoman army and a member of one of the secret societies, went down from Constantinople to Basra trying to gain Ibn Sa'ud to the Arab nationalist cause.<sup>1</sup>

The Arab nationalist movement in the Ottoman Empire was a very recent growth. It had developed side by side with the Young Turk movement and was inspired by the same doctrines. The Young Turks were officers and bureaucrats who had studied in Europe or in European schools in the Empire. They were overwhelmed both with the superiority of European methods, and with the weakness and disorganisation of their country. The simple and attractive idea occurred to them of transforming the institutions of the Empire in imitation of Europe, thereby ridding it of the evils which menaced its existence. The first requisite, they thought, was to transform the Ottoman Empire into an Ottoman Nation; they thus invented the doctrine of Ottomanism. The subjects of the Sultan were now, according to this doctrine, to be considered, whatever their language or creed or previous position in Ottoman society, equal citizens of the Ottoman State, equal members of the same Ottoman Nation, endowed with the same rights and charged with the same duties. This doctrine was bound to disrupt the Ottoman Empire, in the same way that Greek and Balkan nationalisms had been slowly disrupting it in the nineteenth century. Ottomanism broke the original compact on which the Empire may be said to have always rested; it did violence to so many established rights, privileges and arrangements, that the attempt to apply it could not but be resented and resisted. The doctrine laid down that the citizens of the Ottoman Nation were to have a common consciousness of their Ottoman nationality, and thus achieve the unity which would be the efficacious bulwark of the Ottoman Empire. This doctrine was artificial and had no roots in the country. It could appeal to nobody's loyalties,

<sup>1</sup> Nuri al-Sa'id, *Muhadarat an al-Harakat al-Askariyya lil Jaish al-Arabi fi'l-Hijaz wa Suriyya, 1916-1918* (Lectures on the Military Operations of the Arab Army in the Hijaz and Syria, 1916-1918), Baghdad, 1947, pp. 6-7. Nuri al-Sa'id does not explain how a lieutenant, presumably on the active list, could go up and down the Empire on such a quest. Al-Umari (*op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 61-2) says that Nuri al-Sa'id was one of many 'Arab political criminals' who had taken refuge with Sayyid Talib in Basra, whom the Ottoman authorities could not molest, because they were afraid of the Sayyid who had just had a vali of Basra murdered. Tahsin al-Askari, *Mudhakkati an al-Thawra al-Arabya al-Kubra wa al-Thawra al-Iraqya* (My Memoirs on the Great Arab Revolt and the Iraqi Revolt), vol. I, Baghdad, 1936, pp. 42-4, states that after the Aziz Ali affair, Nuri al-Sa'id fled to Egypt and then went disguised to Basra. From there he led a mission to the Sultan of Masqat in an attempt to enrol him in the Arab Movement, as his scheme of a visit to Najd was opposed by Sayyid Talib.

which went, as before, to the family, the clan, and the religious community. To establish and run the new order on it, as the Young Turks attempted, was to build on sand. Ottomanism had another drawback. It tried to justify Ottoman power to Ottoman subjects with reasons that could easily be invoked in order to justify, should the opportunity arise, the overthrow of this very power. In Macedonian and Armenian and Arab breasts the sacred ardours of nationalism could be fed by fuels other than those of Ottomanism. Nationalism is not a doctrine which the governors of an empire may advocate with impunity. The Young Turks were, of course, only following in the footsteps of the Greek and Balkan nationalists, and in so doing, they insured the realisation of the hopes of these nationalists, namely, the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. But just as these doctrines invented by the Young Turks could have no possible relevance to the government of the Empire, so the doctrines of the Arab nationalists were pointless in the government of these provinces of the Empire which they claimed to be Arab. These provinces faced the same perennial difficulties and problems as the rest of the Empire—problems of economic organisation, of humane and efficient administration, of an equitable balance between majorities and minorities that have been and always must be the preoccupation of those who attempt to govern such an area. A narrow and alien doctrine regimenting such a society into sovereign nations had nothing to contribute to the solution of its problems. What it could do was rather to add one more fanaticism to the many already afflicting this stricken land.

The doctrines of the Arab nationalists were the exact counterpart of the doctrines of the Young Turks and therefore tended to the same result. But this is not to say that they arose as a reaction to actual Young Turk policy. It was not Arab discontent which created Arab nationalism; the two doctrines were simultaneous in their manifestation. The Young Turks, in the few years of power they exercised before the outbreak of war, had not been oblivious of Arab rights, and had in fact, tried to conciliate the Arab nationalists. When a few students and journalists assembled in Paris in June 1913 and called themselves the Arab Congress<sup>1</sup> the Young Turks approached them and offered to conciliate them by conceding some of their demands on the government of the Arab provinces. The events which followed this approach are significant. Some of the nationalist leaders believed that it was possible to attain Arab national aims without

<sup>1</sup> Particulars of this Congress are to be found in Gooch and Temperley, vol. X, part II, pp. 825-6. The Decentralisation Party of Cairo was the prime mover of the Congress.



seceding from the Empire, but these were in the minority. Most of the nationalists, both civilian and military, followed the logic of their doctrine and refused to admit any possible co-operation between Arab and Turk in one state, or any diminution in the sovereign rights of the Arabs. They were prepared to assert these rights, if need be, by force and rebellion, and with the help of any foreign Power which might encourage their ambitions.<sup>1</sup> Among those who thought co-operation possible was Abd al Hamid al-Zahrawi, the President of the Paris Congress who, in January, 1914, accepted a senatorship from the Young Turks in the belief that they would implement their promises, as indeed it seemed they would, for after the Cyrenaican and the Balkan disasters they were not in a position to affront new internal agitation. Abd al Hamid al-Zahrawi was, however, attacked by most nationalists and reproached for consenting to co-operate with the Young Turks. Aziz Ali, the leader of the largely military and extremist party, *Al 'Ahd*, sent him three emissaries, Jamil al Midfa'i, Yussuf al Azzawi and Sa'id al Tikriti, to order him to desist from co-operation with the Ottoman Government and to threaten him with unpleasant consequences if he refused.<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Muhammad Rashid Rida in Cairo, al-Zahrawi attempted to defend himself and justify his policy. He explained that when he came from Paris to Constantinople, he had occasion to find out what the potentialities of the Arab Movement were, and what support it was likely to receive in the Arab countries. He first reviewed the situation of the Arabs in Constantinople and divided them into three categories: traders, students and functionaries. The first and second he eliminated as of no importance in the movement; the third, that of the functionaries, he divided again into four categories: the military officers, the civil servants, the place seekers and the pensioners. Only the category of the officers held his attention: 'As for the officers,' he says, 'they have no experience at all in these matters [politics], and it were better if they did not meddle in them. For the little experience that I have had of them makes me fight shy of any action in which the officers would participate. For instance, Aziz Bey Ali has, today, a grudge against the Government, and therefore wants to undermine the State and shake it to its very foundations. He is dissatisfied and opposed to our understanding with the Government; because, he pretends, such an understanding would halt the Arab Movement. I do not know what is the Arab Movement and

<sup>1</sup> 'I have reported in my dispatch no. 117 of the 24th ultimo the language which has been held to Arab officers in the Turkish army who have visited His Majesty's Embassy and have enquired what would be the attitude of His Majesty's Government in certain eventualities.' Mallet to Grey, Constantinople, March 18, 1914. Gooch and Temperley, vol. X, part II, p. 828.

<sup>2</sup> Tahsin al-Askari, vol. I, p. 36.

whither it is going and whither we are going. He tried very hard to form a following of youngsters in opposition to us, but with God's help he will not succeed. But, as he preserves the appearance of friendship between us, I wanted to discover what he really thought and I found out that, provided he was conciliated by the authorities, he would cease his opposition. You can now see what kind of people consider themselves entitled to be our leaders.' Al-Zahrawi goes on to consider the condition of the Arab provinces: 'As for the Arabs in other parts, they are those of Syria, of Iraq and of the Arabian Peninsula. The Syrians and Iraqis are townspeople, feckless, and accustomed to dependence and obedience; they do not understand and they do not want to understand; they do not help and they do not intend to help, and they do not think it necessary to waken. As for the true Arabs of the Peninsula, these are the people to accomplish what we seek, may God preserve them from evil and give strength to their elbows. It is with them that we must create ties, in spite of their poverty, not weakening, however, our relations with the townspeople.'<sup>1</sup> These views were not shared by many other nationalists. They inclined rather to more active methods.

Among the civilian parties, the most important was the Decentralisation Party, formed in Cairo by Syrian immigrants; this party had members and contacts in Syria. At the outbreak of war in Europe, some of its members were in relations with Storrs in Cairo and seemed to have agreed to send agents from among them to gather intelligence for him in Syria and Mesopotamia.<sup>2</sup> One of their members, Haqi al-Azm, was also trying to gather military information from correspondents in Syria.<sup>3</sup> As for the Arab officers in the Ottoman army, they were enrolled in secret societies which were more turbulent and extreme than the civilian ones. It was this military party whom Faisal, on his arrival in Damascus in March 1915, approached with his news of Kitchener's offer. These officers deliberated among themselves, drew up a list of territorial demands which the Sharif was to present to the British, and took an oath of allegiance to him. Faisal then went back to the Hijaz in June 1915.<sup>4</sup> Jamal Pasha, the Ottoman Commander in Syria, began to suspect that a conspiracy was brewing. Previous to this, in his first days in Syria, he had followed a

<sup>1</sup> Amin Sa'id, vol. I, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-9. The agents were Muhib al-Din al-Khatib who went to Basra and Shaikh Muhammad al-Qalqili who went to Syria.

<sup>3</sup> Letter reproduced in *Verité sur la Question Syrienne*, Constantinople, 1916; also in Amin Sa'id, vol. I, pp. 63-5.

<sup>4</sup> Account based on al-Faruqi's letter to the Sharif mentioned above, p. 36; see also Antonius, p. 159.

policy of conciliation and appeasement,<sup>1</sup> but he must have decided later that a policy of terror would perhaps be more efficacious in stopping what were, as far as he was concerned, seditious activities. But the real threads of the conspiracy eluded him, and instead of taking action against the officers, he arrested, tried and hanged in August 1915, Muslims like Abd al Hamid al-Zahrawi and Abd al Karim al-Khalil, who were indeed Arab nationalists, but who were not, as far as is known, engaged in treasonable activities; Lebanese Christians who had petitioned the French Consul-General in Beirut before the War for the annexation of the Lebanon by France; and harmless members of the Decentralisation Party compromised by the activities of this society in Cairo which had come to Jamal's knowledge.<sup>2</sup> It is, therefore, not true that the Sharif rose in revolt against the Ottomans because of the atrocities of Jamal Pasha in Syria.<sup>3</sup> What Jamal did was what every commander in wartime has a duty to do. The treason that he suspected was real enough; only, as his Intelligence was not skilled and his methods were bungling, he laid hold of the wrong people. But his was neither the first nor the last attempt, in the administration of military justice, to use a bludgeon where a subtle scalpel was needed. It is also said that Jamal attempted to exterminate the Syrians by famine. But in Syria, as elsewhere, the normal wartime scarcities were felt<sup>4</sup> and Jamal

<sup>1</sup> Amin Sa'id, vol. I, p. 58; As'ad Daghir, *Thawrat al-Arab (The Revolt of the Arabs)*, Cairo, 1916, pp. 160-1.

<sup>2</sup> One of the officers in the Sharif's conspiracy was later, in May 1916, tried and hanged in the second of Jamal's assizes. He was Amin Lutfi, of whom the *Arab Bulletin* (no. 2, of June 12, 1916) says that he was in command of Antioch district and that he arranged a mutiny of all the Mosul and North Syrian troops in anticipation of Allied action at Alexandretta in 1915. Another, Abd al Ghani al-Uraisi, belonging to the secret society, *al Jamyat al Arabyah al Fatat*, had together with members of *Al 'Ahd*, elaborated the demands which the Sharif should make on the English in return for his help; see Tahsin al-Askari, vol. I, p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> That Jamal's measures in Syria were not considered at the time wanton cruelties is suggested by the writer of the report on Panturianism, mentioned above, who points out that the Committee of Union and Progress did not consider that their severities in Syria could be taken for racial persecution; for when they tried to justify the Armenian massacres they argued that they were not exterminating alien races, but merely punishing political traitors, referring to their treatment of the Syrian notables to prove this point, assuming that none would attribute a racial motive to their repression in Syria.

<sup>4</sup> The Druzes of Hawran, the granary of Syria, hoarded the grain, and sold it at prohibitive prices, instead of delivering it to the Ottoman authorities. See Muhammad Kurd Ali, *Khitat al Sham (History of Syria)*, vol. VI, Damascus, 1925, p. 146; also, Halide Edib, *Memoirs*, 1926, p. 390; and L. v. Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, Annapolis, 1927, p. 236. Shakib Arslan states that Jamal did not requisition supplies from the Druzes for fear of antagonising them, and that the Druzes sold wheat at tenfold its normal price; 'La Mort du Patriarche Maronite,' *La Nation Arabe*, Geneva, November-December, 1931.

Pasha does not seem to have deliberately induced famine. In the Lebanon, however, he may have followed another policy. William Yale, whom the American State Department employed during the War to report on Middle Eastern conditions, and whose knowledge of the area, as may be seen from his reports, was meticulous and exact, wrote in a report of June 1917, 'In Mount Lebanon the situation beggars description. By the military order of Djemal Pasha, who has shown a disposition to exterminate the Lebanon population consisting for the most part of Christians and Druzes, the transportation of wheat and other food supplies were prohibited.'<sup>1</sup> Jamal, in fact, was insistent, during his period in Syria on the mission of the Ottoman Empire as the Defender of Islam. His propaganda against the Sharif took the line that the Sharif was a dissident from Islam who had accepted Christian help in order to destroy the caliphate and to further his own ambitions. The denial of supplies to the Lebanon, if it did take place would be consistent with this theme, for he could, at one and the same time, show the Muslims how he himself dealt with Christians who wanted to be annexed by France, and weaken the potential power of a population the loyalty of which he had reason to doubt. That he may have had a fair measure of success, in his first design at any rate, is shown by the comment of Amin Sa'id the nationalist chronicler of the Sharif's revolt who, writing in 1934, has this comment to make on Jamal's treason trials of 1915-16: 'Jamal Pasha committed another moral crime,' he says, 'for he has branded all those whom he hanged or exiled or condemned *in absentia*, with the crime of treason and conspiracy against the State. The accusation is correct in the cases of Nakhla al-Mutran, Yusef al-Hani, Petro Paoli, who were trying to help France acquire Syria . . . but the accusation is not correct in the case of the other martyrs who had committed no crime, and were not traitors deserving to be tried, much less to be hanged; and they would not have been, had not Jamal wished to get rid of them and to annihilate in their persons the Arab Movement.' And he goes on to say: 'In short, if Jamal had found it sufficient to punish persons such as those who were working for the foreigners, probably none would have opposed him, and the people would have followed and supported him.'<sup>2</sup> Which,

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.II., Report of June 27, 1917, on 'Palestine-Syria situation'; his reading of the situation is confirmed by the Report on Pan-Turanianism already cited. Kurd Ali, however, in *Al-Mudhakkirat (Memoirs)*, vol. I, Damascus, 1948, pp. 204-5, attributes the famine to speculation in foodstuffs by Lebanese notables. It would have been surprising had a black market not existed, but the question is whether Jamal deliberately enhanced normal wartime scarcities, and on this, the evidence is, as yet, inconclusive. S. Arslan, *loc. cit.*, rightly points out that the Muslims and the Druzes of the Lebanon, as well as the Christians, suffered from the famine.

<sup>2</sup> Amin Sa'id, vol. I, pp. 98, 102.

in fact, the people of Syria did, until the Ottomans were defeated by the British troops in 1918.

The Sharif Husain, the Pretender to the Muslim caliphate, then found himself the ally and perhaps the instrument of these nationalist officers who, having decided to risk their lives and positions in a desperate revolt, would not be content with serving a caliph without a realm. They would fight the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and McMahon's commitments they would consider a mockery. A doctrine sustained them, with the aid of which they would oppose the arrangements of the Powers and the schemes of the statesmen; and no scruple or regard would stop them, for they had nothing to lose except their lives, and what they stood to gain was an empire or perhaps a few kingdoms. They were the first enemies of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and their employment by the Allies the first step towards its destruction.

'The scheme', Balfour was to write in 1919 of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, 'was not thought out, it had obvious imperfections; but if honestly and sympathetically worked by the superintending Powers it might easily have proved a success.'<sup>1</sup> This epitaph on the ill-fated instrument is just. The Agreement broke down not because it was in radical contradiction with other engagements entered into by England and France, such as McMahon's pledge to the Sharif; but because those who made and influenced policy in England, and perhaps also in France, had, when the time came to enforce its provisions, ceased to believe in the ideas which inspired the Agreement. The Sykes-Picot Agreement proceeded on the assumption that the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, while permitting, at last, the satisfaction of the ambitions of certain of the Great Powers, would create a problem of government in these areas which had lain for so long under Ottoman domination. The destruction of Ottoman rule and administration was bound to throw these areas into chaos, to disrupt perhaps their economies, and expose the numerous, isolated and defenceless religious minorities to exaction and massacre. The Sykes-Picot Agreement provided for an authority—that of France and England—to replace that on the destruction of which France and England were bent. The Agreement, therefore, recognised that the Powers not only had interests to satisfy, but obligations to the populations which found themselves involved in this European strife of which they understood nothing. The Sykes-Picot Agreement was the last responsible attempt on the part of Europe to cope with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and to prevent the dissolution from bringing disaster. The attempt to carry it out

<sup>1</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Series I, vol. IV, p. 343.

would have met, perhaps, with great difficulties, if only because it consecrated publicly and irrevocably the defeat by Christians of the Muslim ruling classes of the Middle East. But similar difficulties, great as they were, had been met and overcome by the English in India, where the Muslim rulers and magnates had at last reconciled themselves, after the Mutiny, to English overlordship, an overlordship of a kind which, as Balfour again pointed out, 'is not alien to the immemorial customs of the Eastern world.'<sup>1</sup> These immemorial customs would, in the end, have perhaps facilitated the imposition of an order to replace the Ottoman one, had the will to impose an order been manifest; but it was not manifest, and this is why the attempt to carry out the Sykes-Picot Agreement was neither sympathetic nor honest. Very few people believed in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and among those on the English side who did, it is a moot point whether Sir Mark Sykes can be included.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

### CHAPTER 3

#### *Sir Mark Sykes*

WHEN Sir Mark Sykes<sup>1</sup> died in February 1919 he was known as a sympathiser with Arab Nationalism and with Zionism and as a believer in Armenian independence. 'Mark Sykes,' said his colleague, Ormsby-Gore, 'was the chief motive force in London behind the British Government's Near Eastern policy in the War. He inspired both the Arab and Jewish policies and was chiefly responsible for securing their adoption by Ministers at home.'<sup>2</sup> And twenty years after his death, an English official document was to describe him as 'definitely sympathetic to the Arab cause.'<sup>3</sup> But Sir Mark Sykes was also the negotiator of an agreement incompatible with the claims of Arab, Jewish and Armenian nationalism. This particular contradiction, however, becomes insignificant when it is remembered that, until the outbreak of war, nobody was likely to associate Sykes with schemes for partitioning the Ottoman Empire and still less, with the encouragement, in the manner of those whom he called 'Balkan mongers',<sup>4</sup> of nationalisms that disrupted it from within. Sykes' change of views needs explanation. Such an explanation is possible, and it would show how Sir Mark Sykes, who began by defending the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, came at last to accept its partition and how he, who had spent his life castigating Eastern nationalisms, ended his life as their fervent advocate; and it may perhaps also show that the contradictions in Sykes's earlier and later attitudes are more apparent than fundamental.

Sykes was a supporter of the Ottoman Empire from his earliest days of travel in the East, in the 1890s. He supported it for the traditional reasons which made Englishmen support it in the nineteenth century. The Otto-

<sup>1</sup> Sir Mark Sykes (1879-1919). A traveller in the East from boyhood. Served in the Boer War, and as honorary attaché in the Embassy at Constantinople. Conservative M.P. for Hull from 1911. Negotiated with Picot the Agreement which bears their names, and, as an Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet continued to advise the Government on Eastern affairs till his early death at the age of forty.

<sup>2</sup> Shane Leslie, p. 288.

<sup>3</sup> Report of a Committee . . . to consider certain Correspondence between . . . McMahon . . . and the Sharif of Mecca . . . Cmd. 5974 (1938), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, 1915, p. 333.

man Empire was an obstacle to the ambitions of other European Powers in the Middle East, particularly Russia: 'The Ottoman Empire in Asia must affect us as a nation very directly. If the Mediterranean littoral, the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles, and Smyrna passed into the hands of other nations with fleets,' Sykes told the House of Commons in August 1913, 'our position there . . . would be impossible . . . Russia would naturally have to have her share of the Ottoman Empire, and our diplomatic relations with her would consequently be more difficult than in the past.'<sup>1</sup> There was another reason for wishing the Ottoman Empire to survive: 'If we go back in History,' he said in an earlier debate in May 1913, 'we find constant war in that part of the world which is the Ottoman Empire in Asia Minor. I would only remind [the House] that it has been the scene of constant strife between Persian and Greek, Roman and Parthian, Roman and Sassanian, and afterwards between the Arabs and the Byzantines, and peace only came when that particular tract came practically under one Government.'<sup>2</sup> Sykes was always aware of the difficulty of government in the East, of exercising authority over its anarchic and heterogeneous populations with economy and efficacy. Of Syria, for instance, he said that its population 'is so unharmonious a gathering of widely differing races in blood, in creed, and in custom, that government is both difficult and dangerous. Twenty years ago, [he was writing in 1904], the state of Syria from Aleppo to Aqaba was roughly one of mild anarchy tempered with revolutions and massacres, while between Aleppo and Damascus, the Bedawin wandered as overlords of the desert, plundering caravans within sight of the very towns and ever encroaching upon the cultivated lands to gain the coveted pastures.'<sup>3</sup> This absence of public civility made necessary the imposition of order from above by men who 'can manage the East without worrying it,' men like Clive, Nicholson, Burton, Napier and Gordon,<sup>4</sup> or Cromer, 'a strong, dominant figure, dreaded by the inferior race whom he knew not and who knew not him';<sup>5</sup> men who supplied in the overseas possessions of England the requisite principle of authority which the Ottoman administrators supplied in the Middle East, for the preservation of peace and security. And there were no others within the Ottoman Empire who could supply it. On this Sykes was emphatic. The Arabs, whether settled or nomad, he thought devoid of any political capacity. 'The inhabitants of Mosul are of the true, proud, bigoted, conceited town Arab tribe, such as inhabit Hama, Homs

<sup>1</sup> H. C. Deb. 5S, vol. 56, col. 2315, August 12, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> H. C. Deb. 5S, vol. 53, cols. 380-1, May 29, 1913.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Sykes, *Dar ul Islam*, 1904, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Leslie, p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.



and Damascus. Eloquent, cunning, excitable and cowardly, they present to my mind one of the most deplorable pictures one can see in the East: diseased from years of foul living, contemptuous of villagers, with all the loathsome contempt of a stunted cockney for a burly yokel; able to quote poetry in conversation; hating the Turks—their immeasurable superiors—as barbarians; idle beyond all hope, vicious as far as their feeble bodies will admit; ready to riot and slay for the sake of fanaticism as long as there is no danger; detesting Europeans with a bigoted, foolish, senseless hatred; insolent yet despicable; ready to cry Kafir to a stranger and fly ere his head is turned. With the minds of mudlarks and the appearance of philosophers they depress and disgust the observer.<sup>1</sup> And the bedwins were no better. 'At Manaieh I camped for the first time with the great tribe of the Shammar Arabs, and I must say that a more rapacious, greedy, ill-mannered set of brutes it would be hard to find. These animals are, unluckily, pure Bedawi, and have not been tintured with either Turkish or Kurdish blood, which always has a softening and civilising effect on these desert tramps.'<sup>2</sup> For the Armenians, and the Eastern Christians in general, his contempt is unlimited. 'This abominable race,' as he called the Armenians, inspired with him 'feelings of contempt and hatred which the most unprejudiced would find it hard to crush'; 'even Jews have their good points, but Armenians,' he insisted, 'have none.'<sup>3</sup> These people were, of course, not fit to govern themselves, much less others. 'In a time of famine at Van, the Armenian merchants tried to corner the available grain; the Armenian revolutionaries prefer to plunder their co-religionists to giving battle to their enemies; the anarchists of Constantinople threw bombs with the intention of provoking massacres of their fellow-countrymen. The Armenian villages are divided among themselves; the revolutionary societies are leagued against one another; the priests connive at the murder of a bishop; the Church is divided at its very foundations.

'If the object of the English philanthropists and the roving brigands (who are the active agents of revolution) is to subject the bulk of the Eastern provinces to the tender mercies of an Armenian oligarchy, I cannot entirely condemn the fanatical outbreaks of the Moslems or the repressive measures of the Turkish Government.'<sup>4</sup>

British imperial interests and the necessity of maintaining order in the area, both called for the support of Ottoman rule. Sykes's views, so far, merely express—albeit eloquently—the traditional justification of England's

<sup>1</sup> *Dar ul Islam*, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, p. 441.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Sykes, *Through Five Turkish Provinces*, 1900, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, pp. 417-18.

Eastern policy in the nineteenth century. Such views are, however, not incompatible with the advocacy of the partition of the Empire should circumstances make necessary a new imperial strategy, or should Ottoman rule break down and plunge the Middle East into a dangerous confusion. Sykes's doctrine was, in this, consistent with the Agreement which the War made it necessary to negotiate with France and Russia. Indeed, just before the War, Sykes began to have misgivings about the durability of Ottoman rule: 'In the Ottoman Empire now, I think,' he told the House of Commons in March 1914, 'we see a country approaching the crisis which precedes the dissolution of even the most tenacious invalid. I know that in 1852 the Emperor Nicholas spoke of the "sick man," and I believe that in the sixteenth century Queen Elizabeth's Ambassador said that things could not go on much longer. Now, I think the Ottoman Empire . . . has two things affecting it which never affected it before, even at its worst. In the one case it has modern finance to cope with, and in the other case it has received a moral shaking from which it would be difficult to recover, and that is from the events of the last five or six years since the Constitution.' Sykes went on to discuss the possibility of the failure of Ottoman rule and to appeal to the Great Powers to take measures in order to avert its consequences: 'If the Triple *Entente* can adopt a policy of good government, with, let it be clearly understood, no financial bias, the difficult problems of the Mediterranean grow simple.'<sup>1</sup>

But for Sykes, the Ottoman Empire was not merely a bulwark against Russian ambition, or a power maintaining the necessary order in anarchic regions. The Ottoman Empire represented a principle which was far more important and went deeper than strategy and government. He considered that there was an Ottoman, or rather an Eastern way of life, retaining all the precious things that the West had forsaken in its search for material power and prosperity. The most vivid impression perhaps that one gathers from his books is that Eastern society is sustained by the age-old consolatory certainties that serve to make life more decent and merciful, and to preserve the dignity of the humblest individual. In the East there is much cruelty and oppression, it is true, but there are also kindly habits which take the sting out of them; whereas in the West cruelty and oppression, which exist in equal measure, are unredeemed by mercy, but are codified and regimented, made monstrous and inhuman. Here is a contrast he makes between Europe and the East which movingly expresses his vision: 'We stayed a day in Tiflis and saw poor people for the first time since we left Europe. By poor I do not mean Dervishes, or

<sup>1</sup> H. C. Deb. 5S, vol. 59, cols. 2165 and 2171, March 18, 1914.

beggars, or cripples, or blind, for in Turkey there are many of these but they are not poor. They have but to ask for bread, and a Zaptieh, a Pasha, a Shaykh, an Imam, a street boy, a merchant, a soldier, a robber, a peasant or a baker will give to them without comment; for in Turkey, unless there is an absolute famine, no one need starve. But in Tiflis we saw the poor of Europe—the poor who live in foul, narrow alleys, the poor who starve with gaunt grey faces of hopeless misery, the poor who work for a miserable wage, the poor who build railways and manufacture "civilisation". Tiflis has some fine modern buildings; Tiflis has a picture gallery; Tiflis has a museum; and Tiflis has slums, wretchedness, and want in its back streets. Tiflis is, in fact, a European town; the East has been rolled back for a time, and the happy, swashbuckling, open-handed people, who fought and loved and lived their lives, are now ground into the mill of progress; and we must take off our hats and salute that subaltern of Cossacks who is riding down the streets at the head of a squadron to save a tramcar from the hands of the strikers.<sup>1</sup> The East preserved, then, all the qualities which the West had lost. A social order compounded of small, intimate communities; authority hallowed by mercy, descending by small visible degrees from governor to governed; lord and serf, rich man and poor man rooted in the dignities and obligations of their station, owing respect to each other, and moved neither by fear nor contempt; all doing homage in their lives and thoughts to the divine eternal order of which their society on earth was but the mirror. This was what the West once had been and what the East still was. The East must be protected from the degradation of the West: industry, international finance, utilitarianism and the profit motive. Sir Mark Sykes believed in Tory Democracy.<sup>2</sup> Middle class ideals and interests, according to this creed, had overwhelmed European civilisation and destroyed the harmony of the classes.<sup>3</sup> Middle class values were cheap, tawdry, artificial, reflecting neither the high breeding and fine sensibility of aristocracy, nor the deep, true, instinctive and intuitive understanding of country people and those who are close to the natural order. These middle class values, having destroyed Western society, were now threatening the Eastern order. Sykes's doctrine about the Ottoman Empire is a counterpart of his belief in Tory democracy. This is shown most clearly in the reasons which he gives for the decline

<sup>1</sup> *Dar ul Islam*, p. 242. See also pp. 188, 194 and 209.

<sup>2</sup> 'Tory Democracy is what I am going to try and push for all it is worth.' Letter from Sykes to his tutor, February 25, 1907, Leslie, p. 208.

<sup>3</sup> 'I want you, if possible, to drive in the idea that a good landlord is much cheaper than a corrupt, pushing, clique-ridden, middle-class salary cadging bureaucracy. . . .' Sykes to his father-in-law, May 10, 1907, Leslie, p. 207.

of the Empire. When he first began to know the Ottoman Empire, Sykes became convinced that the powerful and vicious influence of Western civilisation was corrupting and destroying it. His successive journeys to the East confirmed him in these views. The graceless and hateful ways of the West were invading the East, and producing ridiculous, misshapen monstrosities. His books are full of examples, which he recounts with disgusted gusto, of the unfortunate effect of the West on the administration and public institutions especially of the Ottoman Empire. 'Of Palu I saw, indeed, but little, being engaged the whole afternoon with the Kaimakam, [*sous-préfet*], a young Turkish exile. And what foolish talk it was—free press, liberty, and every catchword of the Babu! the result of a half-baked Frank education is depressing. . . . A free press where no one but officials can read or write! The creature could not see for the life of him that the real trouble was due to the mania of himself and all his peers, to become officials, and never to occupy themselves in any other way. Aghas and landlords he looked on with contempt, merchants he derided; it was his only ambition to be a Kaimakam. His idea of reform was the regular payment of Kaimakams, the provision of free illustrated newspapers for Kaimakams to read, the building of railways for Kaimakams to travel by, and eventually the restoration of all Kaimakams to Constantinople, where they would be given places as highly paid deputies in a Parliament of Kaimakams, who would collect and control the expenditure.'<sup>1</sup> His distaste for Western innovations in the East increased with the Young Turk Revolution: 'Young officers were learning to say "J'adore le jambon. Je bois le koniak. Je ne suis pas fanatique. Les paysans sont ignorants. Nous avons la liberté. Nous avons le progrès." The Christians were beginning to quarrel among themselves; the Jews were beginning to peer and peep and talk of Zionism.'<sup>2</sup> And the ferocity of his observation could feed itself all the more on the incongruities created by the Revolution: 'From Bogaditch we proceeded to Balat. I found a Mudir [an administrative officer lower than Kaimakam] sitting in a Serai [Government office] decorated with the most extraordinary political cartoons—among others one from a filthy Italian paper of His Imperial Majesty drunk on the floor of his palace surrounded by the ladies of the harem. This in a Serai seems a little strong; but apparently there is a class of liberal who look upon drunkenness as a sign of emancipation, for I gathered that the meaning of the picture was simply that the Sultan was no longer fanatical.'<sup>3</sup>

The peculiar monster, guardian of Sykes's Eastern bestiary, is the

<sup>1</sup> *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, p. 365.

<sup>2</sup> *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, p. 465.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 488.

Levantine. The role of the Levantine in the modern English doctrine concerning the Middle East is crucial; and it is instructive to trace the process by which he has come to acquire such doctrinal importance. Until the middle of the last century the term 'Levantine' commonly meant a European resident in the Levant. It is in this sense that Kinglake, in an instance noted in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, uses the word. And so it continued to be used till the end of the century, its meaning not indeed fixed and precise, but departing here and there from the simplicity of Kinglake's definition, yet more or less always related to it. W. G. Palgrave, for example, in an essay published in 1872, defines a Levantine 'as one born in the Levant, and with a moiety of Greek or Armenian blood in his veins to dilute the other half, French, English, or Italian. . . .'<sup>1</sup> Cromer, in his *Modern Egypt*, also inclines to the traditional usage, yet is conscious of a pejorative sense, of which he takes notice, that has come to attach to the term. A precise definition he declares impossible, for he points out that some Europeans living in the Levant may be called Levantines, others not; the majority of those who may be so called, he decides, 'are recruited from the southern races of Europe'. 'There are . . . many Levantines,' he goes on to explain, 'merchants, professional men, shopkeepers and others—who are highly respectable members of society. . . . But these are not representative of the class which is conjured up in the mind of the Egyptian Minister or his British adviser, when the word Levantine is mentioned. It is the misfortune of Levantines that they suffer in reputation by reason of qualities which are displayed by only a small minority of their class. It cannot, in fact, be doubted that among this minority are to be found individuals who are tainted with a remarkable degree of moral obliquity.'<sup>2</sup> Another writer, D. G. Hogarth, explains more fully the nature of this moral obliquity; it is that of 'the græculus who lends money in every market of Egypt, makes and sells strong waters to Moslems in most cities of Western Asia, and calmly awaited the coming of the Mahdi at Khartoum, sure, sooner or later, to spoil the spoiler.'<sup>3</sup> From being a European resident in the Levant, a Levantine becomes by degrees, a Southern European who is not strictly upright in his business dealings, more specifically a degenerate Greek usurer and publican thriving on the ignorance and weakness of the Muslim populations with whom he deals, to grow rich by dishonourable means. But there is no necessary reason why the term, taken in this sense, should be confined to Greeks;

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Eastern Questions*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. II, pp. 246-9.

<sup>3</sup> D. G. Hogarth, *A Wandering Scholar in the Levant*, 1896, pp. 191-2

and we find it in fact extended to include Armenians, Eastern Christians in general and, in some cases, any Oriental who is not a Muslim. A particular attitude towards the East is betokened by this gradual change and extension in the meaning of the term. The theory of it, invented and put into circulation by Europeans, was to the effect that Eastern civilisation was purer, more spiritual, more wholesome than Western, and that European greed and viciousness was destroying the East; further, since the viciousness and greed of Europe was flowing into the East through the non-Muslim Levantines, who were open to it because of the common religion which they shared with Europeans, it followed that these Levantines were the corrupt element in Eastern society, the nefarious carriers of the infection. The theory is neatly illustrated in an essay by Ninet, a Belgian Consul in the Ottoman Empire and subsequently a supporter of Arabi's movement, translated and published in a book designed to illustrate this very theory, which Lord Stanley of Alderley brought out in 1865.<sup>1</sup> 'Less than fifty years ago,' says Ninet, 'the simple word of a Mussulman merchant was worth a bond in the bazar. His yes, with a clasp of the hand was his signature. . . .

'Now it is no longer so, or, rather, such is no longer the rule, but the exception. . . . They eat out of china, make use of silver plate, their abodes grow handsomer . . . and their tables grant hospitality to the forbidden fruit, but their good faith loses on the one side what luxury and vanity gain on the other. . . .

'In fact, what part of our character is it that we Europeans allow to come to the surface and show itself to the eyes of these nations in our transactions with them? An immoderate love of lucre, which deserves in general a baser name. If they are acute, we are cunning; if they employ cunning, we have recourse to deceit. . . .' The baleful Levantine, impregnated with these vices, infects the Muslim with his own corruption: 'It will perhaps be objected, But why does the Mussulman vekil become the accomplice of the Christian merchant? We refer these wise critics to the serpent and the apple of the Garden of Eden. Do not receivers make thieves?'<sup>2</sup> But the vicious influence of Europe could patently not remain confined to one class of the population, but needs must taint men from all classes. It was possible and easy to go a stage further, from a belief in the moral obliquity of the Levantines, as a class in Ottoman society, to one in the spiritual

<sup>1</sup> On Lord Stanley of Alderley, who became a Muslim, see Bertrand and Patricia Russell, eds., *The Amberley Papers*, 1937, index; and the article devoted to him in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>2</sup> H. Stanley, ed., *The East and the West: Our Dealings with our Neighbours*, 1865, pp. 67-73.

decay of the Levantine, as a human type to be found in all classes and denominations. The term Levantine became a symbol of a moral and intellectual condition, carrying with it an almost theological odium. A Levantine was no longer a man of this or that class, a member of this or that community, following such and such an avocation, he represented one of the many forms which the miserable human condition takes, and became akin to the envious, the lecherous and the proud. Sir Alfred Lyall quotes with approval a description of 'the Levantine youths in the Syrian towns' as a 'tourbe de déclassés'.<sup>1</sup> Professor Browne, the Cambridge Orientalist, differentiates carefully between the 'genuine Turk' and the 'hybrid Levantine'.<sup>2</sup> And Mr Buxton, travelling to Constantinople after the Revolution of 1908, meets him and his like in the ranks of the Young Turks: 'restless, dissatisfied, denationalised, frequenters of café-chantants, ashamed rather of the primitiveness and ignorance of their government than of its inhumanity and corruption.'<sup>3</sup> By the end of the first World War, the doctrine had been so firmly established that an article in the *Near East* could lay down solemnly: 'The failure of Turkey is the failure of Rome. Rome fell because there remained no Romans, and Turkey will fall because in Constantinople there remain no Turks. They have become "Levantine-y". A Turk will trace in his family, perhaps, a Circassian mother, an Egyptian grandfather, here a rich Greek, always an Albanian or a Jew. He differs only in this respect that he forms the aristocracy of "Levantinia". Throughout the centuries many people have come to the city, the city of the Great Whore has sucked most of them in and spat them out Levantines—a people who are not a people, without patriotism, without honour, talking myriad tongues in jargon, the sole people of the world without one virtue.'<sup>4</sup> The doctrine finally acquires the authority of the learned diagnosis in a passage such as this, declaring that 'the Levant is a region of the spirit no less than a region of the globe' and that the spread of the Levant is 'the characteristic malady of Islamic and of Arabic society'.<sup>5</sup> The geographical label has ended by expressing a philosophy of history. But the philosophy bristles with difficulties. For this new doctrine concerning the Levantine assumes that human beings, or cultures, or traditions can be separated into 'genuine' and 'hybrid', and that the former is necessarily always superior to the latter. Such a notion is incapable of

<sup>1</sup> In preface, p. xiv, to V. Chirol, *Indian Unrest*, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> In preface, p. x, to Sykes's *Dar ul Islam*.

<sup>3</sup> C. R. Buxton, *Turkey in Revolution*, 1909, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> *Near East*, January 22, 1920.

<sup>5</sup> 'Meleager': 'Islam in Syria,' in A. J. Arberry and R. Landau, eds., *Islam Today*, 1943, p. 65.

proof; it derives from a hasty European romanticism dividing the human race into 'nations', each endowed with a personality and a collective will, sacred, inalienable and incapable, without offence, of mixing with the personality of another 'nation'. Any influence by one civilisation on another is, on such premises, undesirable and pernicious. But the premises must lead to absurdity, for the East today, borrowing the nationalist doctrines of the West, not to mention its industrial and scientific technique, is more Levantine than ever, and the doctrine itself, based on European assumptions, becomes itself, by its own definition, the essence of Levantinism. The doctrine must break down for it is peculiarly irrelevant to Middle Eastern conditions. The Middle East is always a crossroads, leading to Central Asia, India, the Mediterranean and beyond, swept by the wind of conquerors and colonisers, traversed and retraversed by travellers, traffic and merchandise. For good or evil, its destiny is to receive influences, to assimilate them or, more rarely, to reject them. It may be that such a destiny is a malady, but it has been a perpetual malady, and the attempt to restore the patient to good health may perhaps end in his demise. There exists a sounder and more compassionate doctrine concerning the Levant. A writer, attempting to describe the Lebanon, says of its population that 'it is no more Phœnician than Egyptian, Ægean, Assyrian or Mede, Greek, Roman, Byzantine or Arab, . . . it is European in its alliances, Turkish in its customs. We may say at the most that it is a Mediterranean species, probably the most difficult to describe. It has its own physiognomy and none other. And it is not possible to understand the Lebanon of today without accepting it exactly for what it is.'<sup>1</sup> Not only of the Lebanon but of all the Middle East must this be said. And what the Middle East exactly is, appears nowhere better perhaps than in a passage of Sir Charles Eliot's descriptive of Constantinople: 'Nothing, perhaps, gives one a better idea of the character of its inhabitants than what is styled an *Almanach à l'usage du Levant*. Every leaf which is daily torn off . . . bears inscriptions in six languages: Turkish, French, Bulgarian, Greek, Armenian, and Spanish in Hebrew letters. It records the flight of time according to five systems. Thus the same day is described as December 9, 1898, new style, or November 27, old style; or Rejeb 26, 1316, for the devout Mohammedan, who counts from the Hijra; or Teshrin-i-sani 27, 1314, for the official Turk who follows the "financial year" (a remarkable invention of the Sublime Porte); or Kislev 25, 5659, for the Jew who does not pretend to be a Christian. Nay more, the *Almanach* extends the same large impartiality to all religions. It registers

<sup>1</sup> M. Chiha, *Liban d'Aujourd'hui* (1942), Beirut, 1949, p. 49.



the disagreeable ends of Greek, Bulgarian, and Armenian martyrs, and bids the believer rejoice, according to his particular convictions, over the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, the Prophet's journey to heaven on a winged steed, and the dedication of the Temple of Jerusalem—all these exhilarating events being commemorated on the same date. Besides this, it informs us that the day in question is the thirtieth after Kassim, that twelve o'clock Turkish, or sunset is at 4.30 p.m. *à la franca*, and that midday is 7.23 Turkish. How unlike the narrowness of the almanack which hangs on the wall in front of me at present and assumes that all decent people belong to the Established Church and are chiefly interested in knowing what are the lessons for the day! The little Levant almanack does, it is true, give a certain pre-eminence to Mohammed and his celestial tour; he sprawls over the middle in triumphant Arabic flourishes, crowding the Bulgarian and Armenian martyrs into corners, and casting vowel points and spots parlously near the Immaculate Conception. But though recognising the predominance of Islam, it addresses a public which has no one language, religion or code of institutions. It wishes to be useful to the Pasha and to the Rabbi; to him who speaks Bulgarian and to him who speaks French; to him who thinks the sun sets at 4.30, and to him who considers that mid day is twenty-three minutes past seven.<sup>1</sup> Such exactly is the Middle East, and because it is exactly such, this doctrine about the Levant and the Levantines is false. And the misfortune of the Middle East is that precisely because its condition is such, because it must welcome every novelty and innovation, it has no defence against a doctrine which does such intimate violence to the core of its being. Sir Mark Sykes, describing with contempt the Levantine of fifty years ago, lamented: 'Alas! it is this mule-brained jackanapes who is destined to influence and corrupt every attempt that may be made towards raising the fallen people of Asiatic Turkey.'<sup>2</sup> The irony of things has decreed that the same jackanapes, forsaking the superstition of Progress current in Europe at the turn of the century, has now taken up the notions of Levantinism and genuineness, which have supplanted the earlier fallacy, and has thus remained ever, on Sykes's definition, the deplorable essential Levantine.

Sykes was a great believer in the Levantine. He was convinced that the Levantine, whom he knew also by the name of *Gosmobaleet*,<sup>3</sup> whether in the guise of an Armenian agitator educated by the American missionaries,

<sup>1</sup> Charles Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 1907, pp. 134-5.

<sup>2</sup> *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, p. 408.

<sup>3</sup> For his definition of *Gosmobaleet*, see *Dar ul Islam*, p. 18n.

or in that of a member of the Committee of Union and Progress, was the ruin of the Middle East. The Young Turk Revolution confirmed his fears. He grew ever more pessimistic, as he watched the Young Turks in the exercise of power. The spectacle was unedifying: 'The sober Turk was taught to drink,' he wrote after his visit to Constantinople in 1913, 'the faithful soldier to mutiny; religion was mocked and despised. Every beastly thought that the exiles of Abdul Hamid had picked up in the gutters of the slums and ghettos of the Capitals of Europe burst forth in foul luxuriance. Cinema shows—vile, obscene and blasphemous—brothels filled to overflowing, clubs where vice and politics rubbed elbows, scurrilous prints and indecent pictures flooded the city. The licentious anarchism of the apache of Montmartre, the dark terrorism of the Portuguese Carbonari, the destructive idealism of the French Revolution, the half-digested theories of Spencer, Nietzsche and Hartmann, the paralysing influence of a perverted freemasonry, fermented together, and produced a strange compound of negations which replaced the power of the fallen Caliphate.'<sup>1</sup> He expressed his misgivings in his speech of March 1914 in the House of Commons. He went as far as to envisage the disappearance of the Ottoman state. But such a prospect he did not find entirely hopeless: 'Even supposing the Ottoman Empire fails! Supposing that the Central Government fails! There are the seeds of native States which exist in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire at the present moment which could be made into independent states. If the worst comes to the worst, there are Armenians, Arabs and Kurds who only wish to be left in peace to develop the country.' These native states *in posse* had one advantage over the Ottoman Empire, governed as it now was by the Young Turks. They would not be run by atheistic and cosmopolitan Levantines, unable to defend the people from 'the tyranny of the concessionaire'; for should these genuine natives take over from the hybrid Young Turks, it would be a great step 'towards freeing the Concert of Europe from the shackles of the financial organisations which no one who has studied international politics at all', he affirmed, 'can fail, indeed to see frustrating the movements of the Concert as a whole at every turn.'<sup>2</sup> These prognostications followed the lines of the distinction which he had made long ago in *Dar ul Islam* between the *Gosmobaleet* and the genuine article: 'I asked one young bedawi [at a school for the sons of tribal chiefs at Constantinople] how many years he had been there. "Four," he answered. "How many more will you stay?" "Two," he replied. Then I asked, "Which are

<sup>1</sup> *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, p. 508.

<sup>2</sup> H. C. Deb. 5S, vol. 59, col. 2171, March 18, 1914.

better, houses or tents?" His yellow eyes blazed with remembrance, he hesitated a moment and cried "By my God, tents!" There was one of a superior race. No "Gosmobaleet"; no weak clutching at a stranger's creed; no uncertain discontent; no shame of ancient custom. From that one sentence I knew there was hope for the East, and that hope is not founded on the adoption of spring-sided boots and bad manners by native Christians, but on the wild, brave, manly races who, having learnt, have weight and character enough to retain their own nationality.<sup>1</sup>

When the Young Turks joined the Central Powers, and thus confirmed the poor opinion he already had of them, Sykes was not at a loss in devising a new policy to meet the situation. Here were these seeds of native states with which to begin regeneration of Asiatic Turkey: the Armenians, the Arabs, the Kurds. It is true that in the past he had not thought much of their ability, or their sense of responsibility, but the lack of these was a minor blemish compared with the iniquity of the Young Turks. If these seeds of states could not govern, why, they would learn, and there were benevolent European Powers to teach them. They would learn how to govern, and being genuine and not hybrid, they would be preserved from Levantinism, atheism and materialism. The Arabs in particular would recreate the ancient glories of the caliphate, and, combining the latest European methods with the piety and tolerance of the Muslims of the Golden Age, would set up a new dyke against the barbarism overtaking Europe: Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, genuine not *Gosmobaleet*, proud and chivalrous, generous, pious and tolerant. 'The Arab in the fourth century liked Corinthian columns so much that he built them in the desert. . . . People were studying Plato in Baghdad in the eighth century. . . . The Baghdad Railway a return to what was the Overland Route of the Middle Ages.'<sup>2</sup> And there were men in the Arab world, class II of the Ancient Moslems he called them,<sup>3</sup> 'tolerant and scrupulous' who, if encouraged, would bring about such happy results. In this belief he recommended to the War Committee in July 1916 that 'towards all Arabs . . . we should show ourselves as pro-Arabs, and that whenever we are on Arab soil we are going to back the Arab language and Arab race.'<sup>4</sup> And with such hopes in his breast he wrote a harangue for the benefit of the people of Baghdad which was published to them by authority of the War Cabinet when the city fell to British arms in 1917: 'O people of Baghdad! Remember that for 26 generations you have suffered under strange

<sup>1</sup> *Dar ul Islam*, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie, p. 261.

<sup>3</sup> For this nomenclature see *ibid.*, pp. 243-4.

<sup>4</sup> McMunn and Falls, p. 231n.

tyrants who have ever endeavoured to set one Arab house against another in order that they might profit by your dissensions. Therefore, I am commanded to invite you, through your Nobles and Elders and Representatives, to participate in the management of your civil affairs, in collaboration with the Political Representatives of Great Britain who accompany the British Army, so that you may unite with your kinsmen in the North, East, South and West in realising the aspirations of your race.<sup>1</sup> He would recreate Arab History, infuse the spirit of their past into them, reawaken in them the memory of their vanished greatness. He designed the flag which the sharifians adopted to show them to what heights they could aspire: 'Black for the Abbassids of Baghhdad, white for the Omayyads of Damascus, green for the Alids of Kerbela, and red chevron for Mudhar heredity.'<sup>2</sup> Of course, if there was to be a return to the eighth century, then it was essential to bring about a 'Unity' embracing all the points of the compass, just as the flag embraced all different sects and dynasties which had divided the Arab past. Such was the logical fulfilment of his vision. He was tireless in pressing 'Unity' on the Arabs of the Hijaz, on the Syrian *émigrés* and on the British Government. One does not know what effect an exhortation such as the following, addressed to Syrians in Paris in 1918, would have on those whom his travels had taught him to regard as anarchic: 'Rally together, unite, and you will become a powerful political force.'<sup>3</sup> To the British Government at any rate, his vision had become so compelling, that they felt it necessary to inform the Sharif of Mecca officially through Hogarth, that 'the *Entente* Powers are determined that the Arab race shall be given full opportunity of once again forming a nation in the world. This can only be achieved by the Arabs themselves uniting, and Great Britain and her Allies will pursue a policy with this ultimate unity in view.'<sup>4</sup>

The ideas of Sir Mark Sykes were undoing the Sykes-Picot Agreement. These ideas were in no way compatible with the scheme of things envisaged in the Agreement. The Agreement proceeded on the assumption that the European Great Powers were the ultimate arbiters of the destiny of the Middle East and that its government meant the preservation of order and the control of petty tyranny. The Sykes-Picot Agreement never envisaged the creation of 'genuine' nations to replace the 'Levantine' Ottomans, or the resurrection of historical glories, or the attainment of such a problematic and ambiguous aim as 'Unity'. Of the excellence of all these things Sykes was convinced, and as he was a man of position and

<sup>1</sup> A. T. Wilson, *Loyalties, Mesopotamia, 1914-1917*, 1930, pp. 237-8.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie, p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> Y.P.I.

<sup>4</sup> Cmd. 5964 (1939), p. 3.

authority in Oriental questions, he inspired many with his conviction. This is not to say that he was guilty of duplicity in negotiating the Agreement. The Agreement, as his biographer rightly points out, was not his own invention;<sup>1</sup> he was an agent, acting on the instructions of the Foreign Office, who probably accepted the Agreement as least conflicting with the traditional lines of English policy. Nor was Sykes, in the advocacy of his notions, moved by anti-French sentiment. Such a thing may be said with perfect justice of others who had a say in the elaboration and execution of English policy, but not of him. To the end of his life he remained a firm believer in the *Entente* policy of England. What he hoped to see rather was France in partnership with England engaged in defeating the Levantine, and restoring the reign of the Genuine. These hopes were chimerical. The Genuine never existed. And even if it did, to restore it meant to exclude completely, and that—considering the circumstances—with the help of the European Great Powers, these very European influences which had gone to form the hated Levantines. This Sykes would not see. He wanted the East to reach the prosperity of Europe without being contaminated by the ills of Europe. The desire was contradictory and unattainable. In fact, there was no room for choice. The influence of Europe was inevitable. The aim which might be attainable, the desire which was perhaps feasible, was to see that this influence, whenever it was harmful, did not work irreparable damage. There were two European influences the spread of which was, in the circumstances, as universal as the effect of which was dubious and unfortunate. The first of these was the doctrine of nationalism—of which that of Levantinism is itself a special variation—a doctrine unsuitable to Middle Eastern conditions. The second was modern industrial organisation. This organisation was forged in Europe, the society of which it overturned and transformed. At the end of the first World War it would impinge with terrific and incalculable force on Middle Eastern society, the structure of which was largely mediæval. Sykes did not look at the situation in this way. He believed that the Levantines—who for him epitomised the evils of the West—could be abolished, that there were classes in the East not yet infected by Levantinism—as he understood the term—who could take on the duties of government and begin the regeneration of the land. This regeneration Sykes saw attained through the creation of modern states. But the only native classes who could work a modern state in the East were those who had been subject to the same influence as the Young Turks, *Gosmobaleet*, a collection of half-educated functionaries who, to use his own concise

<sup>1</sup> Leslie, p. 20.

and exact expression, applied 'a European Jacobinism to Sunni Mohammedanism'.<sup>1</sup> Sykes's dream had to be entrusted to their impetuous and violent hands, and the Agreement which he had negotiated was made difficult, and perhaps impossible, to carry out.

The 'Unity' which Sykes wished to see in the Near East was to embrace others besides the Arabs, regenerated and delivered from the Levantines. The Jews and the Armenians, similarly fallen, were equally crying out for regeneration. Sir Mark Sykes was a Zionist, but quite a recent convert. Until 1914, he had a very poor opinion of Zionism which he declared to be 'Cosmopolitanism and bad finance'.<sup>2</sup> And it was not merely Zionism, but the whole of Jewry which was suspect to him. Jews were not genuine, they were *Gosmobaleet*, Levantine. 'This War and its questions are too hopelessly involved for me to discuss,' he writes of the Boer War from South Africa in 1900, 'my opinions are as follows:

1. Boers are beasts.

2. British colonists are liars or Jews. . . .'<sup>3</sup>

In 1901, he reaffirms: 'If it gives pleasure to some to see sleek, fat Jews and their womenkind talking to one another, I am not one of those.'<sup>4</sup>

The two themes of the European folklore about the Jews, their ubiquitousness and their occult and sinister, usually financial, influence are evident in Sykes's writings. The Jew as a creature set apart, an agent of reaction or revolution, pursuing hidden aims of his own, divine or demonic as the case may be; such is the picture usually found in the writings of men of letters and science, Liberal or Conservative, Progressive or Reactionary, in the nineteenth century. Disraeli, 'that mighty genius',<sup>5</sup> as Sykes called him, was a very eloquent exponent of the Jewish mystery. The elements of the European picture of the Jew—separateness, secrecy and financial omnipotence—are present in Disraeli's delineation. The Jew is destined to accumulate money: '... I wonder,' says Tancred of Sidonia, 'how a man with his intellect and ideas can think of the accumulation of money.' '... 'Tis his destiny,' is the answer he gets, 'he can no more disembarass himself of his hereditary millions, than a dynasty of the care of empire.'<sup>6</sup> The Jew is set apart for a divine mission: 'The Jews represent the Semitic principle; all that is spiritual in our nature. They are the trustees of tradition, and the conservators of the religious element.'<sup>7</sup> The Jew

<sup>1</sup> Leslie, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, p. 509.

<sup>3</sup> Leslie, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148; see also a cartoon by Sykes entitled *The Diaspora*, *ibid.*, facing p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> Leslie, p. 209; 'Disraeli's *Tancred* and *Sybil* (fairly just analysis of the elements which have developed into the world in which we live),' Sykes in a letter quoted *ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>6</sup> B. Disraeli, *Tancred* (1847), Bradenham Edition, 1927, p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> B. Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck* (1852), 1905 Edition, p. 323.

wields a secret influence: 'When the secret societies, in February 1848, surprised Europe, they were themselves surprised by the unexpected opposition, and so little capable were they of seizing the occasion, that had it not been for the Jews, who of late years unfortunately have been connecting themselves with these unhallowed associations, imbecile as were the governments, the uncalled for outbreak would not have ravaged Europe. But the fiery energy and the teeming resources of the children of Israel maintained for a long time the unnecessary and useless struggle.'<sup>1</sup> On these Jewish characteristics, then, both those who liked, and those who disliked Jews were agreed; these characteristics were immutable for, as nineteenth-century science had it and as Disraeli so well expressed it, 'All is race; there is no other truth.'<sup>2</sup> It is therefore possible for a writer such as Hilaire Belloc to affirm: 'We know a horse to be a horse, an apple to be an apple, a Chinaman to be a Chinaman, or a Jew to be a Jew by some process on which philosophers can debate, but upon the virtue of which no sane man doubts and upon the right action of which we base our lives.'<sup>3</sup> Those who dislike Jews appeal to the same dogmas as Disraeli. 'A Hebrew proverb which Lord Beaconsfield quotes in one of his novels, speaking of what is to happen in the fulness of time,' declares a writer in *The Fortnightly Review*, in 1878, 'announces that "we shall yet see an ass mount a ladder." . . . The Hebrew proverb has received its fulfilment: we have seen the ass mount the ladder. . . . It applies not only to Lord Beaconsfield but to the historic race of which he is one of the most illustrative ornaments. . . . In administration, in finance, and in journalism, Jewish influences shape and guide English politics. This is not a new thing in European history, though in England it is now more pronounced and obvious than it has ever been before. The phenomenon itself however, is two thousand years old.'<sup>4</sup> Professor Freeman solemnly warns: 'It is no use mincing matters. The time has come to speak out plainly. No well-disposed person would reproach another either with his nationality or his religion, unless that nationality or that religion leads to some direct mischief. No one wishes to place the Jew, whether Jew by birth, or by religion, under any disability as compared with the European Christian. But it will not do to have the policy of England, the welfare of Europe, sacrificed to Hebrew sentiment . . . we cannot sacrifice our people, the people of Aryan and Christian Europe, to the most genuine belief in an Asian mystery. We

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> *Tancred*, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> H. Belloc, *The Jews*, 1922, p. 297.

<sup>4</sup> 'The political adventures of Lord Beaconsfield,' *Fortnightly Review*, vol. XXIII, N.S. 1878, pp. 480-1. The Review was then edited by John Morley. The article is said to be by Professor Goldwin Smith, see *Commentary*, New York, January 1952, p. 22

cannot have England or Europe governed by a Hebrew policy.<sup>1</sup> And Belloc sums up judicially: 'There is no race which has produced so few traitors. It is not treason in the Jews to be international. It is not treason in the Jew to work now for one interest among those who are not his people, now for another. He can only be charged with treason when he acts against the interests of Israel, and there is no nation nor ever has been one in which the national solidarity has been greater or national weakness in the shape of traitors less. . . . He [the Jew] will serve France against the Germans, or the Germans against France, and he will do so indifferently as a resident in the country he benefits or the country he wounds: he is indifferent to either.'<sup>2</sup> Such an ambiguous and anomalous situation must obviously lead to the Gentiles disliking, then persecuting, then spoiling, then massacring the Jews. There is only one way out: if the Jews are a separate race, a nation on their own, then let them be like all the nations, let them acquire a government and a country of their own, and their situation would then be open and above-board, and nobody will be frightened of them, and therefore nobody will hate them. ' . . . My friends and I had in some general sense a policy in the matter; and it was in substance the desire to give Jews the dignity and status of a separate nation. We desired that, in some fashion, and so far as possible, Jews should be represented by Jews, should live in a society of Jews, should be judged by Jews and ruled by Jews.' Thus G. K. Chesterton, who goes on to protest that this attitude, for which he and his friends 'were for a long time rebuked and even reviled,' and which has been called Anti-Semitism, should really be called Zionism.<sup>3</sup> Such exactly was Sir Mark Sykes's Zionism, and such was the Zionism of some at least, of the leaders of the Zionists. The Jews, according to them also, were set apart, a separate nation, perhaps a race on their own. The Jews who refused to see this were not really Jews. 'The question which gives so much trouble to the diluted and hyphenated West End Jew—' a Zionist writer informed the readers of the *Palestine News*, a British army newspaper, in 1918, 'the question whether Jews are or are not "a separate nationality" does not exist for the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe.

'They are a nation, a mutilated incomplete nation without a country or government of their own—but still a nation, and neither they nor their friends or enemies had ever thought of questioning this fact.'<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Freeman, *The Ottoman Power in Europe*, 1877, pp. xviii-xx.

<sup>2</sup> Belloc, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The New Jerusalem*, 1920, pp. 264-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Palestine News*, December 19, 1918.



hyphenated and diluted Jew, as Belloc and Chesterton insisted, was both the cause and the result of Anti-Semitism. Were he to become 'normal', like other people, he would no more give rise to suspicion: 'When the Zionists can point proudly to a Jewish navy who has *not* risen in the world, an under-gardener who is not now taking his ease as an upper-gardener, a yokel who is still a yokel, or even a village idiot at least sufficiently idiotic to remain in his village, then indeed the world will come to blow the trumpets and lift the heads of the everlasting gates; for God will have turned the captivity of Zion.'<sup>1</sup> Sokolow, the Zionist leader and ideologue, agreed fully: 'A guiding principle of our life is the return to nature. The conviction has taken shape in my mind that this can be done, and that it must be done. We must create realities, great Jewish realities.' So he makes the Zionist, whom he calls the New Jew, define the aims of his creed, from which it follows that those who do not share in it are unnatural, unreal Jews. 'We modern Jews are all in the air. We have imagined an abstract Judaism,' the New Jew complains, 'forgetting that spiritual and individual activity not resting upon the simpler activities of life, degenerates into subtlety and trickery.' Unreal, unnatural, subtle and unreliable the Jew must be, if he is not a Zionist. Faced with such an implication, Sokolow makes a daring remark, which, ironically, echoes Chesterton's protest that he is no Anti-Semite, 'You are,' he says to his New Jew, 'if I may use the paradox, a little bit of an Anti-Semite.'<sup>2</sup>

The Jews were to be regenerated, they were to become a nation of genuine peasants and squires, like everybody else, not financiers, cosmopolitans and radicals. That was why Sir Mark Sykes was a Zionist. Zionism, Sykes believed, would show 'the capacity of the Jews to produce a virtuous and simple agrarian population.'<sup>3</sup> Zionism, he knew, 'was an idealistic and not a financial manœuvre.'<sup>4</sup> He had no use for financiers: 'I will speak plainly and do not hesitate to state that he had no liking for the hybrid type of the assimilating Jew. He had no wish to interfere with such people; . . . but he did not like this type just because he was fond of the Jewish people.'<sup>5</sup> What type then did he like? 'The Jews at Nisibin form a large and important Israelite colony: their origin is only noticeable in their large unshapely hands and long flat feet; and their appearance is much

<sup>1</sup> Chesterton, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup> N. Sokolow, 'The New Jew: A Sketch,' in H. Sacher, ed., *Zionism and the Jewish Future*, 1917, pp. 216-17 and 220-1.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Sykes to Solokow, quoted in Christopher Sykes, pp. 219-20.

<sup>4</sup> From a speech by Sykes in Manchester in December 1917, quoted in M. Hay, *The Foot of Pride*, New York, 1950, p. 253.

<sup>5</sup> N. Sokolow, *History of Zionism*, vol. II, 1919, p. xxi.

improved by oriental costume in which any man with a thick nose, dark hair, full beard, and Semitic lips looks noble and dignified. It is indeed a pity that their brethren at home have assumed European attire. Imagine how picturesque and interesting a walk in the City near the Stock Exchange would become; what a blaze of colour Capel Court would be if the children of Israel retained their ancient and handsome dress!<sup>1</sup> The Jews were to transform themselves, to become a nation, to dress in national costume, to till the Judæan earth singing folk songs and dancing to folk music. And the Zionists were to accomplish this transformation. Sir Mark had been mistaken, Zionism was not 'cosmopolitanism and bad finance'; it was against these things. Zionism was all right.

If the Allies were victorious, the whole Middle East would be regenerated. The Arabs would cease to have the minds of mudlarks and walk in the wisdom as well as the appearance of philosophers (they were reading Plato in Baghdad in the eighth century). The Jews were to be no longer fat and sleek but lean and bronzed. The Armenians, likewise, were to arise renewed, delivered from oligarchs and greedy grain merchants. They would all live in their own Palestines, for, 'really there is more than one Palestine. There is one Palestine for the Jews that is the home of the Jewish nation. But there is a Palestine for the Armenians; it is Armenia. There is a Palestine for the Arabs; it is Arabia.'<sup>2</sup>

All these movements, being genuine national movements, could not fail to benefit from regenerating their peoples, so to speak, in tune. The sooner they 'united,' the better. Sir Mark Sykes therefore conceived the Arab—Armenian—Zionist Entente and admonished the Arab leaders in Cairo and the Hijaz to realise it. 'If such an Entente becomes a public fact,' he told the Sharif and his officers, 'then your national movement becomes recognised in every country in the world.'<sup>3</sup> The Arabs, and the Zionists and the Armenians were to be regenerated together. But what if the Arabs or the Zionists refused? What if they should want to regenerate themselves at each other's expense? The Zionists were European doctrinaires seeking a way out for the harried Jewries of Eastern Europe. Their horizon was strikingly limited by time and place. They knew little of Palestine, less of the Arabs, and even less of Islam. They would certainly co-operate, and indeed do anything to secure Palestine, but ignorant as they were of the Middle East, and convinced of their superiority as Europeans dealing

<sup>1</sup> *Dar ul Islam*, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Y.P.I. N. Sokolow in a speech in Cairo, quoted in *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 21, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> Y.P.I. Letter from Sykes to the Arab leaders, November 16, 1917.

with backward Orientals, their efforts would serve only to increase the mistrust of the Arab Nationalists with whom Sykes invited them to deal. And the *émigré* doctrinaires and disaffected officers who constituted the Arab Nationalist Movement were themselves little minded to compromise; the less so indeed that they were at that very time taking lessons in intransigence from another Englishman preaching in their midst.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Colonel Lawrence*

ON the threshold of the contemporary Middle East stands the figure of T. E. Lawrence, an object at once of awe and pity. He is a portent, a symbol of the power of Chance over human affairs, and of the constant irruption into history of the uncontrollable force of a demonic will exerting itself to the limit of endurance. The consequences of his actions have touched numberless lives, and yet their motives were strictly personal, to be sought only in his intimate restlessness and private torment. The poverty of his ideas matches only the passion with which he pursued their realisation. And the cruel irony of his fate is that, though he was intent chiefly on the salvation of the soul of T. E. Lawrence, a private person, it is as Colonel Lawrence, a public legend, engaged in a dubious adventure, that he may claim to survive in men's memories. And he needs must, further to embitter the irony, following his own principles and convictions, acquiesce in such a fate. For he was both a liberal and a romantic. As a liberal, he was blithely unconscious of the gulf that must yawn between thought and action, of the fatal change which comes over thought when flesh and blood enact its consequences; and as a romantic, he believed that the Kingdom of God can be taken by storm, and that political action is a passport to eternal salvation.

But such as he is, he must stand as a sign of our ultimate confusion. For of him we can know nothing that is worth knowing, neither the force that drove him nor the vision that he sought. In the bleak extreme of human experience where we try to follow him, what he can show us most clearly is the mystery of existence, the unknowableness of human motive and the solitariness of the will. To console our ignorance we may scrutinise his books, interrogate his actions, and seek the far-reaching consequences of his fortuitous, momentary and fulgent passage in the East. What is open to us is a game of consequences and no more: he came, he saw, he acted and he went away.

On his coming we need not perhaps dwell, for what is there to say of a young man from Oxford who goes out to the Levant with a confident and self-assured air to dig and make discoveries? Nothing, save that it was

fated so to happen. It is more profitable to ascertain what he saw, and with what eye he looked upon the alien world in which he found himself.

Lawrence experienced no doubts or misgivings when confronted with the spectacle of the Ottoman Empire in the last days of its existence. He could resolve the complexity of its fate with a simple doctrine, and render judgment on it with categorical finality. 'Turkey was dying of overstrain,' he wrote at the beginning of *Seven Pillars*, 'of the attempt, with diminished resources, to hold, on traditional terms, the whole Empire bequeathed to it; 'Turkey was decaying; and only the knife might keep health in her; 'Turkey was rotten'.<sup>1</sup> Such was his summation, while taking stock at the close of his adventure, but also such exactly was his premise at its start. 'Poor old Turkey is only hanging together. . . . Everything about her is very sick, and almost I think it will be good to make an end of her, though it will be very inconvenient to ourselves. . . .'<sup>2</sup> These opinions occur in a letter to D. G. Hogarth of April 1915. They were by no means original; they were, on the contrary, quite current in England in the years before 1914. It is not surprising that Lawrence should have held them, but what is worth noting is the precise source from which he acquired them, and how he transformed them from the subtle, tentative instrument of exploration which they were to blunt, sweeping dogmas, the engines of his haste and violence.

'Not a wild man, but *Mentor* to all of us was Hogarth, our father confessor and adviser, who brought us the parallels of history and moderation, and courage. . . . Hogarth was our referee, and our untiring historian, who gave us his great knowledge and careful wisdom even in the smallest things. . . .'<sup>3</sup> D. G. Hogarth,<sup>4</sup> of whom Lawrence writes in this manner, was one of the very few who were close to him. Their relation lasted from Lawrence's undergraduate days at Oxford until Hogarth's death in 1927. They were associated together in archæological enterprise before 1914 and in the management and control of the Sharifian adventure during the War. After the War, perhaps out of pride in the achievement of his erstwhile *protégé*, and no doubt from the partiality of affection, Hogarth lent his authority to the defence of the Sharifian cause, the service of which was, for a few years after 1918, Lawrence's passion and obsession. Lawrence himself testifies, it has been seen, to Hogarth's intellectual

<sup>1</sup> *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 1940 ed. (hereafter referred to as S.P.), pp. 54 and 56.

<sup>2</sup> D. Garnett, ed., *Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, p. 197.

<sup>3</sup> S.P., pp. 57-8.

<sup>4</sup> David George Hogarth (1862-1927), scholar and archæologist. Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford. Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum. Director of the Arab Bureau, Cairo, 1916.

influence over the circle of the Arab Bureau in Cairo, and Lawrence's writings also testify to the same influence. Not that Hogarth had a clear-cut doctrine about the modern East. It was not his field, and his interests lay rather in archæology and the remoter past. But his intellect was fine and subtle, and he was curious of the world around him. His historical imagination could not help playing over it with theories and interpretations, sensitive, hesitant, undogmatic, perhaps contradictory, perhaps untenable. What they all amounted to was no more than an attitude of mind, what they indicated best was a temper of thought, what they perhaps expressed was a scale of preferences; but the younger men who surrounded him in Cairo, of whom Lawrence had been under his influence longest, took up his suppositions to use them as guides in the action in which they were engaged.

Hogarth shared the prevalent view that the Ottoman Empire was doomed. In his first days in the East, in the 1890s, he thought that only a European occupation could provide a remedy: 'Verily Anatolia is one of the gardens of the temperate earth, and perhaps some day European colonists may return from the lands of fever and fly, where their second generation hardly holds its own and the third fails, to take up this portion of their more legitimate heritage.

'Who else can arrest the Anatolian death? Not the Ottoman rejuvenated by any political alchemy. His organs are wasted too far to be saved by any "reforms".<sup>1</sup> His explanation, however, of Ottoman decline is curiously inconsistent; and the interest and originality of his opinions lie in this very inconsistency. He advances, on the one hand, the usual Liberal theory about the unspeakable Ottoman, unfit to rule Turkish peasants, much less an empire. 'Travellers who assert that they "like the Turk" mean such a "Turk" as this Anatolian peasant. One is bound to like him if only for his courage and simplicity, and his blind fidelity and his loyalty. Those villagers who fought so stubbornly at Plevna and Shipka never received a piastre, but, though they spit at the name of Osman . . . and invoke Allah's curse on Suleiman . . . they say never a word against the Padi-shah. . . . These "Turks" are honest, too, able, unlike the Arab, to withstand long temptation of gold, and gentlemen full of simple consideration for a traveller and just instinct of his needs.'<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Ottoman rulers had tried to mend their ways by adopting measures of European reform. In an essay on *Turkey* published in 1915, which, together with a remarkable paper contributed to *The Arab Bulletin*, in April 1917, contains the bulk of his reflections on the Ottoman

<sup>1</sup> *A Wandering Scholar in the Levant*, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Empire and on Eastern politics,<sup>1</sup> he describes the achievements of Sultan Mahmud II in whose reign measures of reform were given great impetus; this achievement 'was nothing less than the elimination of the most Byzantine features in its constitution and government. The substitution of national forces for mercenary prætorians: the substitution of direct imperial government of the provinces for devolution to seigneurs, tribal chiefs, and irresponsible officers: the substitution of direct collection for tax-farming: and the substitution of administration by bureaucrats for administration by household officers—these, the chief reforms carried through under Mahmud, were all anti-Byzantine. They did not cause the Osmanli state to be born anew, but, at least, they went far to purge it of official sin.'<sup>2</sup> Under Mahmud's successors, however, the achievements of reform were lost and the Ottoman Empire, little by little, relapsed into its original state: 'Despite the good intentions of Abdul Aziz himself . . . and despite more than one minister of outstanding ability, reform and almost everything else in the Empire went to the bad in this unhappy reign. The administration settled down to lifeless routine and lapsed into corruption: the national army was starved: the depreciation of the currency grew worse as the revenue declined and the Sultan's household and personal extravagance increased.'<sup>3</sup> Under Abdul Hamid, the situation worsened: 'Internally, the Empire passed more and more under the government of the imperial household . . . Ministers irresponsible; officials without sense of public obligation; venality in all ranks; universal suspicion and delation; violent remedies, such as the Armenian massacres of 1894 . . .; the peasantry . . . forced ultimately to liquidate all accounts; impoverishment of the whole empire by the improvidence and oppression of the central power—such phrasing of the conventional results of "Palace" government expresses inadequately the fruits of Yildiz under Abdul Hamid II.'<sup>4</sup> This orthodox theory of the essential wickedness and unfitness of the rulers of the Ottoman Empire is most strikingly expressed in a passage in *The Arab Bulletin* in which Hogarth gives his reaction to a Turkish overture for a peace which might preserve, in some fashion, the structure of the Ottoman Empire. 'We are not converted. It would take a good deal more than this interested argument', writes Hogarth in Bulletin no. 74 of December 24, 1917, 'to convince us of the necessity of ensuing no better

<sup>1</sup> Hogarth, it seems, also collaborated in the Peace Handbooks which the Historical Section of the Foreign Office produced for the use of the British Delegation to the Peace Conference; see E. L. Woodward, *Short Journey*, 1942, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> D. G. Hogarth: 'Turkey' in *The Balkans* . . ., by N. Forbes, A. J. Toynbee, D. Mitrany, D. G. Hogarth, 1915, pp. 347-8.

<sup>3</sup> *The Balkans*, p. 357.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.

end than the exchange of one set of Turks for another in the Arab provinces—Opposition for Government or Majority for Minority C.U.P. The Young Turk, as men say, is the son of the Old Turk, and the Old is the father of the Young. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

Side by side with the doctrine that the Ottoman Empire is being destroyed through failure to reform itself, Hogarth suggested another to account for the state of affairs which he observed. But this second doctrine contradicted the first, and was, moreover, a rare one for a European to hold in Hogarth's time. This doctrine held that the Ottoman Empire was perishing not from the failure to reform on European lines, but from the attempt precisely to do so. Hogarth maintained this alternative doctrine in his writings together with the first. 'He was', says Philby of him, 'far too acute to gloss over inconvenient facts';<sup>1</sup> this is exactly what makes the reading of his far too few writings on the modern East so exciting. He was perhaps too sensitive, too observant of the incongruous fact that will not fit into a historical dogma, to acquiesce with comfort in the theory about the Ottoman Empire current in his day which his Liberal instincts inclined him to believe. So he ventured on another explanation of Ottoman decline. 'The only form of government understood in the Ottoman East is immediate, personal government. The introduction of an official system,' he wrote in his *Wandering Scholar*, 'merely results in the multiplication of personal governors.' 'Centralisation', he observed, 'is slow death in such an Empire as the Ottoman whose nervous system of wires and roads is not half-developed, whose brain cannot adequately direct the members. In this heterogeneous loose-knit state such a feudal system as the rule of the *Aghas* a century ago is perhaps best. The feudal lords at least were sensitive to the condition of the peasantry and were punished directly by their disorders'; he therefore thought 'that the Oriental . . . is probably happiest under a mildly "corrupt" and "oppressive" Government'; he explained why European reforms had to fail in the Ottoman Empire: 'The forms of a civilisation based on the equality of all men before the law have been imposed on men who, by religion and custom immemorial, respect persons. A system, presupposing development and progressive adaptation, is entrusted to a people who regard human initiative in change as an insult to the Creator. Centuries of slowly widened identification of the individual with the common claim of humanity lie behind the effective working of the European machine of government: in the Ottoman East the individual is considered alone; there are no common claims of humanity'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. St. John Philby, *Arabian Days*, 1948, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> *A Wandering Scholar* . . ., pp. 90-5.



He therefore disapproved, when in this frame of mind, of the reforming Young Turks; those of the 1870s, of Midhat Pasha's time, would be for him '“Young men in a hurry” who had snatched at the end of an evolution hardly begun, without taking into account the immaturity of Osmanli society in political education and political capacity;’<sup>1</sup> while the members of the Committee of Union and Progress, which carried out the 1908 Revolution, would be ‘military ex-attachés, . . . Jew bankers and officials from Salonika, and . . . doctors, lawyers and other *intellectuels* fresh from Paris’ who understood the Asia they had to govern much less than the Europe where they received their training.<sup>2</sup>

Whether he inclined to approve of reforms or not, Hogarth always expressed his misgivings over the prospect of the downfall of Ottoman rule. In the essay of 1915, he spoke of ‘Arabian fanaticism’ influencing the Osmanlis in the direction of ‘the obscurantist spirit of the earliest Moslems,’<sup>3</sup> and recorded his opinion that the secession of the Arab provinces from the Ottoman state, though it might ‘sound the death-knell’ of the Empire, was ‘a consummation . . . not devoutly to be wished.’ ‘The substitution of Arab administration for Osmanli would necessarily entail European tutelage of the parts of the Arab-speaking area in which Powers like ourselves have vital interests’ and that, because ‘bad as, according to our standards, Turkish Government is, native Arab Government, when not in tutelage to Europeans, has generally proved itself worse, when tried in the Ottoman area in modern times.’<sup>4</sup> Two years after the publication of this essay, he set out to explore, in a long paper which appeared in *The Arab Bulletin*,<sup>5</sup> the contrasts between Arab and Turkish rule, in order to strike a balance between ‘the faults as well as the merits of those we are about to set up; and the virtues as well as the vices of those we are setting down.’ The period of genuine Arab rule, he pointed out, was very short—much less than a century. ‘The brevity of purely Arab Empire was determined less by the force of non-Arab elements than by the inability of Arabs themselves to develop any system of imperial administration more adequate than the Patriarchal.’ The Turks, on the other hand, ‘have supplied to Sunni Islam the only enduring political force which it has known—its single steadying influence.’ They, in contrast to the Arabs, were incapable of excellence in the arts of civilisation, and of originality in ideas, but they were ‘able to administer a system of government and to hold by it, through good or ill: as full of the will to power as any Arab, with

<sup>1</sup> *The Balkans*, p. 360.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 380.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>4</sup> *The Balkans*, pp. 379–80.

<sup>5</sup> Bulletin no. 48, April 21, 1917. See Appendix I for text.

more effective sense of national unity.' 'Left to himself,' he concluded, 'if there were a fair field and no favour, he [the Turk] would undoubtedly continue to govern the Arab as ill as in the past, but to govern and police him always. It is not from failure of either will or capacity', he affirmed, 'that the Turk must give way: nor, when the roof falls on the Philistines, will it be because his old strength has returned to the Arab.'

There is a fineness in Hogarth's hesitancy, which betokens a disinterested pursuit of coherence. Hogarth was not an advocate, and the meretricious urgency of special pleading does not sound in his argument. Even when he defended a political interest which seemed to him worthy of defence, he would not evade or gloss over points detrimental to its case. Thus, in an article of 1920, written to advance the Sharifian cause in Syria, he would point out 'the lack of a general and profound local sentiment of hostility to Turkish rule' in Syria before the War, and how under Abdul Hamid, the province was not oppressed, but did enjoy, on the contrary, conspicuous improvement in the conditions of both urban and rural life.<sup>1</sup>

This is very far from the extravagance of Lawrence, and it is instructive to see what a change an idea suffers when it passes from Hogarth to him, when it ceases to minister to the pacific needs of enquiry and becomes, instead, a weapon of apologetics, useful for offence and defence. Take the comparison which Hogarth makes between Turkish and Arab government and observe what becomes of it in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Where Hogarth argues, goes forward, then returns, hesitates, contrasts and compares, Lawrence lays down the law, categorical and pressing, approval and assent the object of his designs on the reader: 'We could see that a new factor was needed in the East, some power or race which would outweigh the Turks in numbers, in output, and in mental activity. No encouragement was given us by history to think that these qualities could be supplied ready-made from Europe. The efforts of European Powers to keep a footing in the Asiatic Levant had been uniformly disastrous, and we disliked no Western people enough to inveigle them into further attempts. Our successor and solution must be local; and fortunately the standard of efficiency required was local also. The competition would be with Turkey; and Turkey was rotten.'<sup>2</sup> How the rhetoric beckons, the revelation of momentous considerations of policy: 'We could see that a new factor was needed in the East,' the weighty appeal to history: 'No encouragement was given us by history,' the deprecatory and humorous

<sup>1</sup> D. G. Hogarth, 'The Burden of Syria,' *Nineteenth Century and After*, February 1920.

<sup>2</sup> S.P., p. 56.

benevolence: 'we disliked no Western people enough to inveigle them into further attempts,' until we are brought up against the inevitable conclusion: 'our successor and solution must be local,' and it must seem in the end that a competition of rottenness with rottenness is not only inherent in the nature of things, but positively beneficial. Hogarth balanced between alternative explanations of Ottoman incapacity. These alternatives ruled out each other, but Hogarth never made up his mind which was the more satisfactory. Either the Ottoman state was perishing from the imitation of Europe, or it was perishing precisely because it was Ottoman. Lawrence, however, took up both contentions and used them both in *Seven Pillars* to prove that the Ottomans had to disappear, and to justify his actions in helping to bring about their destruction. On the one hand, therefore, he ascribed the parlous condition of the Empire to Young Turk doctrine and method: 'Their administration had become perforce an affair of files and telegrams, of high finance, eugenics, calculations. Inevitably the old governors, who had governed by force of hand or force of character, illiterate, direct, personal, had to pass away. . . . The shallow and half-polished Committee of the Young Turks were descendants of Greeks, Albanians, Circassians, Bulgars, Armenians, Jews—anything but Seljuks or Ottomans. The commons ceased to feel in tune with their governors, whose culture was Levantine, and whose political theory was French.'<sup>1</sup> The Turks therefore had to go, but their going was elsewhere justified by this same 'French' political theory: 'I meant to make a new nation, to restore a lost influence, to give twenty millions of Semites the foundation on which to build an inspired dream-palace of their national thoughts';<sup>2</sup> so much so that when, later in the book, he came to deal with the Sharifian negotiations with the Ottoman government after the outbreak of the Revolt, he showed his disapproval of Jamal Pasha who, according to him, was 'by instinct' Islamic, and therefore, presumably, no believer in French theories, and he bestowed his approval on those sections of the Ottoman General Staff 'who were too keen on the "Turkishness" of their mission to deny the right of autonomy to the Arabic provinces of the Ottoman Empire.'<sup>3</sup>

The Turks then, whether Young or Old, found no favour in Lawrence's eyes. All his actions were to be directed towards the destruction of their Empire. This much is clear. What is not clear is why, exactly, he should have desired this with so much passion, for the reasons that he advances are not reasons, properly speaking, but pretexts. At first

<sup>1</sup> S.P., p. 54. Compare with Hogarth's argument, 93-94 above and in *The Balkans*, p. 380.

<sup>2</sup> S.P., p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> S.P., p. 571.

sight, it may appear this is not so. He was anti-Turk, it may be said, and anti-French, because he had convinced himself of the justice of the Arab cause, because he had made himself the champion of Arab nationhood, against all comers. Does he not declare it himself? '... to make a new nation, to restore a lost influence, to give twenty millions of Semites the foundation on which to build an inspired dream-palace,' 'to extrude the Turk from all Arabic-speaking lands in Asia,' 'to assert the Arabic-speaking peoples' desire or desert of freedom and self-government.'<sup>1</sup> A high aim and a generous ideal: freedom taken, not given, the acquiescent native awakened to 'the discipline of responsibility', fear a mean overrated motive.<sup>2</sup> And consider what he had to contend against: an Indian Government intent on making Mesopotamia a colony like Burma, a British Government thirsting for petrol royalties, and the colonial greed of France in the Levant.<sup>3</sup> There was no question on which side a man should be. Besides, there was good faith involved, his own honour and good name. Should the British Government betray, for the sake of imperialist interests, the Arab national movement, he himself would be dishonoured. Five times in *Seven Pillars* he recurs to the subject of his dishonour. Because the Arabs believed he was 'a free agent of the British Government' and because they believed in persons not in institutions, he had, owing to the exigencies of war, made certain promises to them. And, as he suspected that these would not be kept, he felt 'continually and bitterly ashamed'.<sup>4</sup> He felt like 'a trickster'; his business was fraudulent; he had joined a conspiracy; he was raising the Arabs on false pretences; they were his dupes; he was enveloped in a mantle of fraud; he was engaged in the 'theft of souls'.<sup>5</sup> But in the end, such emphatic protestations must engender doubt. For after all, the Arabs, according to him, were revolting to assert their freedom, presumably of their own volition, not in pursuance of a bargain. But if it was a bargain that they were fulfilling with their rebellion, it was, of course, right and proper that the British should keep to their side of the bargain. But, it may be asked, what had Lawrence to do with the bargain, and why should he feel dishonoured if the bargain were not kept? He was not the British Government after all, nor the keeper of its conscience. Neither did the British Government authorise him to make bargains or distribute promises. What business, then, had he to 'endorse' promises, especially if, as he says, he 'had no previous or inner knowledge of the McMahon pledges or the Sykes-Picot

<sup>1</sup> S.P., pp. 23, 196 and 281.

<sup>2</sup> S.P., pp. 58 and 23.

<sup>3</sup> S.P., pp. 24, 387, 515 and 567.

<sup>4</sup> S.P., pp. 281 and 657-8.

<sup>5</sup> S.P., p. 23.

Treaty' :<sup>1</sup> He says further that he had 'no shadow of leave to engage the Arabs, unknowing, in a gamble of life and death'.<sup>2</sup> But when he came to them, we must observe, they had already engaged themselves beyond recall. His moral dilemma is artificial. He was an officer sent to help men who had no experience of modern war and supply them with money and ammunition. If he insisted on assuming the mantle of a higher authority, he would perhaps feel sometimes that the mantle was fraudulent, but this has nothing to do either with the British Government or with its promises. And the bargain that was not kept, the trickery that succeeded, what was it exactly? 'The Arab Revolt', he declares, 'had begun on false pretences. To gain the Sharif's help our Cabinet had offered, through Sir Henry McMahon, to support the establishment of native Governments in parts of Syria and Mesopotamia, "saving the interests of our ally, France." The last clause concealed a treaty (kept secret till too late, from the Sharif). . . .'<sup>3</sup> Is this true? Or, at least, did he think it true? That it is not true has been, in some measure, established.<sup>4</sup> It may also be established that he knew that it was not true. In May 1917, Sykes and Picot went to Jadda and saw the Sharif, now King of the Hijaz. The King had the following declaration made to them: 'That His Majesty the King of Hejaz learned with satisfaction that the French Government approved of Arab aspirations on the Moslem Syrian littoral as the British did in Baghdad.'<sup>5</sup> At the same time Faisal, on behalf of his father, said to Sykes: 'We are ready to co-operate with France in Syria to the fullest extent and with England in Mesopotamia.' The King of the Hijaz informed Lawrence in July 1917 of these interviews and Lawrence reported that the King was extremely pleased to have trapped M. Picot into the admission that France will be satisfied in Syria with the position that Great Britain desired in Iraq.<sup>6</sup> The Sharif not only knew about French plans in Syria, but Lawrence knew that he knew. This was in July 1917 at the latest. But is it likely that Lawrence did not know earlier? 'Fortunately,' he remarks in *Seven Pillars*, 'I had early betrayed the treaty's [the Sykes-Picot Agreement] existence to Faisal.'<sup>7</sup> When did he do that? Before July 1917? And was a betrayal to Faisal ever necessary?

<sup>1</sup> S.P., p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> S.P., p. 283.

<sup>3</sup> S.P., p. 282.

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 2 above.

<sup>5</sup> See also the French Foreign Minister's telegram of June 18, 1917, Brémond, pp. 168-9, which defines what the French understood by 'Moslem Syrian littoral,' and which gives instructions for the French interpretation to be conveyed to Husain.

<sup>6</sup> Y.P.I., 'British Commitments to King Hussein.' Husain's declaration and Lawrence's report are also cited in D. Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, 1938, pp. 1034-5.

<sup>7</sup> S.P., p. 571.

The Sharif was pleased with his interview and considered that he had trapped Picot. The reason for the satisfaction and the nature of the trap may perhaps become apparent from what Hogarth had to report a few months later concerning the views of the Sharif. 'I interpolated Formula no. 2 (International Administration in Palestine)', says Hogarth in the course of his report on the meeting of January 1918, 'by reminding King of proviso in original Agreements safeguarding special interests of our Allies and especially France. He interpolated humorous references to Fashoda, implying doubt of real and permanent community of interest between France and us.'<sup>1</sup> It is clear that a belief in constant Anglo-French rivalry in the East was a pillar of Sharifiān policy, hence the little anxiety that he displayed about the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and his pleasure in the 'trap' he thought he had set for Picot.<sup>2</sup> For if France acquiesced in the principle that he advanced, he would, in view of her rivalry with England, find little trouble in securing what he wanted from both of them. The failure of this principle involved him in ruin at the end of the War. And it involved Lawrence too in disappointment, for he also was a believer in this rivalry. Even before he knew the Sharif and his sons, and before he made their cause his own, he was making plans to 'rush right up to Damascus and biff the French out of all hope in Syria';<sup>3</sup> and in 1919, Kidston of the Foreign Office, minuting some correspondence concerning the presence of Lawrence in Paris and his status at the Peace Conference, wrote: 'He has told me quite frankly that he has no belief in an Anglo-French understanding in the East, that he regards France as our natural enemy in those parts and that he has always shaped his action accordingly.'<sup>4</sup> It is not likely that Lawrence was ignorant of the situation as between England, France and the Sharif. What is more likely is that he knew what the Sharif had been promised, and what France was to receive, found the arrangement unwholesome and set himself to upset it with all his power. He burned with an abstract, metaphysical fever that did not brook the earthy compromise of conflicting interests. The task that he proposed to himself was not the prosaic one of seeing that England

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 5964 (1939), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence continued after the war to favour the use of the 'trap'. 'With regard to the French coastal area of Syria,' he wrote to Curzon on September 27, 1919, 'they [the French] have accepted the formula "French in Syria as British in Mesopotamia." Therefore so long as we are more liberal ("left" in the Parliamentary sense) we call the tune.' *Letters*, p. 292.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, p. 196, Letter to Hogarth of March 22, 1915; 'So far as Syria is concerned it is France and not Turkey that is the enemy' Lawrence wrote home in February 1915, *The Home Letters of T. E. Lawrence and his Brothers*, 1954, p. 303.

<sup>4</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Series I, vol. IV, p. 370.

honoured its promises—he must have known that these amounted to little—but the far more strenuous one of ensuring in the face of the comfortable arrangements of diplomats and the ordinary weaknesses and ambitions of human beings, the triumph of an idea. He was a doctrinaire. For it is clear that material bargains and specific promises did not interest him. The currency he dealt with was that of moral claims: 'I vowed to make the Arab Revolt the engine of its own success . . . and vowed to lead it so madly in the final victory that expediency should counsel to the Powers a fair settlement of the Arabs' moral claims.'<sup>1</sup> And the results that he claimed to bring about were not those which Foreign Offices are accustomed to envisage: 'One such wave (and not the last) I raised and rolled before the breath of an idea, till it reached its crest, and toppled over and fell at Damascus.'<sup>2</sup> Agreements and pledges are not designed to cope with waves. But in *Seven Pillars* Lawrence argues as though they did, and needs must pretend, therefore, to prove himself right, that pledges were dishonoured and agreements torn up. But he gives fair warning of what he proposes to do, for does he not write at the beginning of his book that 'In this book also, for the last time, I mean to be my own judge of what to say'? And should we therefore not be prepared to see him here too, as he says he did in his reports, 'conceal the true stories of things'?<sup>3</sup>

It was not squeamishness and disgust at the duplicity of England that made him a partisan of the Sharif and the Arab nationalists. He was prepared to condone duplicity on the part of the latter. Very soon after the outbreak of the Revolt, the Turks began to contact Faisal and his followers and to tempt them to a reconciliation.<sup>4</sup> 'He [Faisal] had long been in touch with elements in Turkey,' says Lawrence, but he hastens to explain that this was a profound tactical move to sow dissension within the Ottoman Government and to commit them to compromising offers: 'At first we were offered autonomy for Hejaz. Then Syria was admitted to the benefit: then Mesopotamia. Faisal seemed still not content, so Jemal's deputy . . . boldly added a crown to the offered share of Hussein of Mecca.'<sup>5</sup> But it soon transpires that this is not the whole story. Two pages later, Lawrence declares: 'Events at the end made abortive these complicated negotiations.'<sup>6</sup> Was it then envisaged that they might succeed? To Liddell Hart, who was writing a book about him, Lawrence would say later that

<sup>1</sup> S.P., p. 283.

<sup>2</sup> S.P., p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> S.P., p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> In the manuscript of *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence indicates that Jamal Pasha contacted Faisal after the fall of Wajh to the Sharifians in January 1917, six months after the beginning of the Revolt. Brémond states, p. 103, that Oppenheim had opened negotiations with Husain even earlier.

<sup>5</sup> S.P., p. 571.

<sup>6</sup> S.P., p. 573.

'Faisal never told him about his negotiations in the summer of 1918', that Faisal was 'definitely "selling us"', and that when he, Lawrence, found Faisal out he 'pretended to take it as a piece of political tactics, and suggested to Faisal to develop'.<sup>1</sup> At any rate whether Faisal was negotiating, or only pretending to negotiate with the Turks, Lawrence did not disclose these negotiations to his superiors: 'I feared that the British might be shaken at Faisal thus entertaining separate relations. Yet in fairness to the fighting Arabs, we could not close all avenues of accommodation with Turkey.'<sup>2</sup> He objected to duplicity on the part of England, but not on that of the Sharif and his followers. While on active operations, some of these had entered into communication with the Turks, and the British authorities at Cairo came to know of these illicit contacts: 'We rang up Cairo and announced that the situation at Guweira was thoroughly good, and no treachery abroad. This may have been hardly true; but since Egypt kept us alive by stinging herself, we must reduce impolitic truth to keep her confident and ourselves a legend.'<sup>3</sup> For this incorruptible, then, there were, as for ordinary men of affairs, politic and impolitic truths. And it may be that his indulgence for the Sharifians was not limited to the hiding of impolitic truth. If Abd al-Rahman al-Shabandar is to be believed, it was Lawrence himself who encouraged Faisal to keep negotiations open with the Turks 'should Allenby fail in his attack and the British make peace with the Conservative Turks'.<sup>4</sup> He pretended to Cairo, he pretended to Faisal, and perhaps to himself. Perhaps it was necessary that he should, in the middle of delicate and dangerous operations. This is one of the risks of the game he had decided to play. But if everything and everybody was involved in pretence, why confine the indignation and the denunciation to British and French policies? Was deceit on the part of Faisal more pardonable than on the part of the Allies? And, if it was necessary that he should pretend in the midst of action, was it necessary that he should pretend to his readers, in a book which was to be a work of art, a distillation of past experience? 'Pretences,' he knew, 'are hollow worthless things.'<sup>5</sup> Perhaps, then, he could not distil his experience, and perhaps *Seven Pillars* was a mere continuation of the tangled campaign he had chosen

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Liddell Hart, *T. E. Lawrence to his Biographer*, 1938, p. 142. Liddell Hart's notes on talk with Lawrence, August 1, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> S.P., p. 573.

<sup>3</sup> S.P., p. 335.

<sup>4</sup> Abd al-Rahman al-Shabandar, 'Lawrence fi al-mizan' [Lawrence in the balance], *Al-Muqtataf*, vol. 79, 1931. He added 'and King Faisal sent a friend of ours to Constantinople for this purpose.' Al-Shabandar (1886-1940) was a Syrian nationalist leader who had fled from Jamal Pasha's inquisition in Syria in 1915 and knew Lawrence in Cairo.

<sup>5</sup> S.P., p. 30.



to wage, an additional weapon in his private war. Can this be the reason for his discontent with the book? For of course, if the book was a piece of special pleading, it might be *A Triumph*, but the triumph would be hollow, impotent, and the Kingdom remain impregnable.

Shall it then be said that Lawrence was a partisan doctrinaire? There are many reasons why he deserves such an appellation. But if he was a partisan, what was his party? The Sharif? The sons of the Sharif? The Sharif, according to him, was impossible: he was an ineffective tyrant. 'My object with the Arabs,' he wrote to Robert Graves in June 1927, 'to make them stand on their own feet. To do this it was necessary to check centralising policy of King Hussein, who envisaged a united Arab world, under himself at Mecca. Mecca was a hotbed of religion, quite impossible as the capital of any sort of state: the worst town in the Arab world. Yet for the war we had to pretend that he led, since unity is necessary in a movement.'<sup>1</sup> The sons of the Sharif then, perhaps? Not the eldest, Ali: 'His manner was dignified and admirable, but direct; and he struck me as a pleasant gentleman, conscientious, without great force of character, nervous and rather tired';<sup>2</sup> definitely not Abdullah, the next: 'I had made up my mind that Abdullah was not the necessary leader';<sup>3</sup> as for Zaid, the youngest, he was 'a shy, white, beardless lad of perhaps nineteen, calm and flippant, no zealot for the Revolt'; he would definitely not do. Faisal, then, perhaps? He had been impressed with Faisal, from the first moment when he saw him 'framed between the uprights of a black doorway, . . . a white figure waiting tensely' and 'felt at first glance that this was the man I had come to Arabia to seek—the leader who would bring the Arab Revolt to full glory.'<sup>4</sup> Faisal was 'hot-tempered and sensitive', 'appetite and physical weakness were mated in him, with the spur of courage',<sup>5</sup> he was 'full of dreams, and the capacity to realise them, with keen personal insight and a very efficient man of business.'<sup>6</sup> Faisal, who looked 'like a monument of Richard I at Fontevraud',<sup>7</sup> 'a prophet who, if veiled would give cogent form to the idea behind the activity of the Arab Revolt,' was 'all and more than we had hoped for, much more than our halting course deserved.'<sup>8</sup> And as the Revolt grew and prospered, Faisal 'showed himself worthy of this achievement. . . . He was recognised as a force transcending tribe, superseding blood chiefs, greater than jealousies. The Arab move-

<sup>1</sup> R. Graves, *T. E. Lawrence to his Biographer*, 1938, p. 51. See also *Letters*, p. 577, where he speaks of 'all our detestation of his misgovernment.'

<sup>2</sup> S.P., p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> S.P., p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> S.P., p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> S.P., p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> T. E. Lawrence, *Secret Dispatches from Arabia*, 1939, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> S.P., p. 99.

ment became in the best sense national, since within it all Arabs were at one, and for it private interests must be set aside; and in this movement, chief place, by right of application and by right of ability, had been properly earned by the man who filled it for those few weeks of triumph and longer months of disillusion after Damascus had been set free.<sup>1</sup> Shall it then be said that he was Faisal's partisan, that he believed in Faisal and thought him worthy of service and devotion? No! For suddenly, towards the end of *Seven Pillars*, he comes out with this surprise: 'Faisal was a brave, weak, ignorant spirit, trying to do work for which only a genius, a prophet or a great criminal, was fitted. I served him out of pity, a motive which degraded us both.'<sup>2</sup> And it must be out of pity, too, that Lawrence gives Faisal the quality of courage, for to Liddell Hart he was to say some years later: 'Faisal [was] a timid man, hated running into danger, yet would do anything for Arab freedom—his own passion, purely unselfish. Here, as later in Iraq, it made him face things and risks which he hated. At original attack on Medina he had nerved himself to put on a bold front, and the effort had shaken him so that he never courted danger in battle again.

'As for his statesmanship,' Lawrence went on, 'his defect was that he always listened to his momentary adviser, despite his own better judgment.' When Liddell Hart asked him why then he portrayed Faisal in his reports as a heroic leader, Lawrence said that 'it was the only way to get the British to support the Arabs—physical courage is essential demand of typical British officer.'<sup>3</sup>

Was it then an idea that secured his loyalty? Perhaps he was an Arab nationalist. Had he not spoken of freedom, and how it is taken, not given, of 'the Arabic-speaking peoples' desire or desert of freedom and self-government, of the right of the Arabic-speaking provinces to autonomy? But here, again, it is easier to see his disbelief in the Arab national movement than his belief in it. '... their idea of nationality,' he writes of the Hijaz in a report of November 1916, 'is the independence of tribes and parishes and their idea of national union is episodic, combined resistance to an intruder. Constructive Politics, an organised state, and an extensive empire are not only beyond their capacity, but anathema to their instincts. . . . Unless we, or our Allies, make an efficient Arab empire, there will never be more than a discordant mosaic of provincial administrations.'<sup>4</sup> '... The words Syria and Syrian,' he writes in another report published in *The Arab Bulletin* in March 1917, 'are foreign terms. Unless

<sup>1</sup> S.P., p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> Liddell Hart. *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>3</sup> S.P., p. 582.

<sup>4</sup> *Secret Dispatches* . . . , p. 39.

he has learnt English or French, the inhabitant of these parts has no words to describe all his country . . . *Sham* in Arabic is the town of Damascus. An Aleppine always calls himself an Aleppine, a Beyrouti a Beyrouti, and so down to the smallest villages. This verbal poverty indicates a political condition. There is no national feeling.' 'Time seems to have proclaimed', he again says in the same report, 'that autonomous union is beyond the powers of such a people. In history, Syria is always the corridor between sea and desert, joining Africa to Asia, and Arabia to Europe. It has been a prize-ring for the great peoples lying about it . . . and when given momentary independence by the weakness of its neighbours, it has at once resolved itself into Northern and Southern, Eastern and Western "kingdoms" . . .; for if Syria is by nature a vassal country, it is also by habit a country of agitations.' 'The phrase "Arab Movement,"' he wrote in 1918, 'was invented in Cairo as a common denomination for all the vague discontent against Turkey which before 1916 existed in the Arab provinces. In a non-constitutional country these naturally took on a revolutionary character and it was convenient to pretend to find a common ground in all of them. They were most of them very local, and very jealous, but had to be considered, in the hope that one or the other of them might bear fruit.'<sup>1</sup> He did not believe, then, that an Arab national movement existed. But can it be that he was nonetheless an Arab nationalist, in the belief that nationalism was beneficial and necessary to the Arabs? Does he not say that he 'meant to make a new nation', and that 'so high an aim called out the inherent nobility of their minds, and made them play a generous part in events'?<sup>2</sup> Whence, then, this prudent imperial stance, this note of diplomatic worldliness: 'They [the Arabs] were weak in material resources, and even after success would be, since their world was agricultural and pastoral, without minerals and could never be strong in modern armaments. Were it otherwise, we should have had to pause', he sagely warns his readers in *Seven Pillars*, 'before evoking in the strategic centre of the Middle East new national movements of such abounding vigour.'<sup>3</sup> 'Remember,' he reassures Liddell Hart, 'I have always been a realist and opportunist in tactics: and Arab unity is a madman's notion.'<sup>4</sup> Why then all the talk of betrayal, the insinuations of sordid interests, the anger and the scorn flashing through *Seven Pillars*? Was it for this that he agitated, and intrigued, and accused and denounced, for an 'imposed government' in Syria, to which England would be 'founder's

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-8.

<sup>2</sup> *S.P.*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Liddell Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Secret Dispatches* . . ., p. 158.

<sup>4</sup> *S.P.*, p. 13.

kin' ? For, according to him, in Syria, an Arab government would have to be imposed: 'Whatever the limits of future politics, it can hardly be contested that, like a European government, an Arab government in Syria, today or tomorrow, would be an imposed one, as the former Arab governments were.'<sup>1</sup> He had started with an imposed Turkish government which he wanted to overthrow, and he ended with an imposed Arab government which he wanted to set up.

He was, of course, aware of the nature of the Arab government which he wished to 'impose' on Syria. It was a Sunni Muslim government, 'pretending to revive the Abbassides or Ayubides'.<sup>2</sup> Sunni Muslim sentiment was the driving force behind 'Arab' nationalism, as it was the force that kept together the Ottoman Empire. The chiefs of the movement which Lawrence supported were Sunni dissidents, in revolt against the Sunni Ottomans, but not, for all this, the less imbued with 'that deep craving for temporal dominion which actuates Sunnis', attention to which was drawn by the writer of a brilliant note on the capture of Baghdad, in *The Arab Bulletin*.<sup>3</sup> Arab nationalism was the Sunni spirit of dominion, exacerbated and made virulent by the illegal and violent manner in which its leaders attempted to wrest power from the Ottoman state. The Arab nationalists would insist as much as the Ottomans on Muslim supremacy, but they would be incapable of practising the contemptuous, easy-going tolerance of the Ottomans which made Muslim supremacy bearable to the heterogeneous populations under their rule. The Arab nationalists would not be able to practise this tolerance because power was new to them, and because, unlike the Ottomans, they would be uncertain, and therefore violent in the exercise of it; and further, because the very doctrine in which they expressed their craving for dominion—the European doctrine of nationalism—made non-conformity difficult, and the demands of the rulers on the ruled more insidious and more sweeping than ever. 'Our kingdoms lay in each man's mind'; 'we had to arrange their minds in order of battle'; 'there were many humiliating material limits, but no moral impossibilities':<sup>4</sup> so Lawrence congratulates himself on the discovery of a new method for winning battles without the shedding of blood; and his jubilation seems to us sinister in the age of *New-speak* and *Doublethink*, of the re-education camp and the political commissar. The nationalists were to learn, and that was perhaps the chief

<sup>1</sup> *Secret Dispatches* . . . , pp. 78 and 161.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> 'Mesopotamia: Baghdad and Moslem feeling,' *Bulletin*, no. 47, April 11, 1917. See appendix II for the relevant extract.

<sup>4</sup> *S.P.*, pp. 198 and 201.

lesson that he taught them, that there were indeed no moral impossibilities.

'I wish I hadn't gone out there: the Arabs are like a page I have turned over: and sequels are rotten things', he wrote in 1921.<sup>1</sup> 'The Arab thing is finished', he declared a year later, 'and is passionately unwholesome in my eyes.'<sup>2</sup> That Lawrence should speak in such violently personal terms of the public and far-reaching events in which he had been involved, is in character. If it is asked why he involved himself in a cause which was, on his own showing, so dubious, why he 'prostituted'<sup>3</sup> himself and his talents, espousing sordid quarrels and furthering unedifying ambitions, the answer must be sought more in his agitated and forceful personality than in the events in which he happened, quite by chance, to be mixed up. He believed neither in the Sharif, nor in Faisal, nor in the Arab national movement. Neither when he was in the East, nor when he was agitating for them in Paris and London, nor when he was writing *Seven Pillars*. Had he believed in them, he would not have declared the 1921 Middle Eastern settlement—so poor and patched up and tattered a thing—'the big achievement of my life; of which the War was a preparation'<sup>4</sup> nor would *Seven Pillars*, tendentious as it is in its account of the events, have been so unskilful and so contradictory in the defence of their cause. *Seven Pillars* is a book which seeks to justify, and to prove right, not so much the Arab movement, as his own actions. He therefore chose whatever explanations seemed to offer the most convincing pretexts for his actions, however damaging they were to the cause he had adopted. Ultimately, he was not interested in ideas. Ideas he took as they offered; in the event, he took them from Hogarth. He was a doctrinaire empty of doctrine, and a partisan without party. He was oblivious of the consequences of his actions on others, of right and wrong, of truth and falsehood. What interested him rather were his own sensations, and to see how he could manipulate events. He was, in truth, engaged on an illicit adventure, in a kind of witchcraft and black magic. He had made a discovery, that 'mental and physical were inseparably one'<sup>5</sup> and that there were no moral impossibilities; he wanted to see what the power of one will could accomplish, to what extent the mental could rule the physical, and whether indeed there were no moral impossibilities. It was a wager that he accepted, out of curiosity almost, in a scientific spirit: 'the conjunction of Semites, an idea, and an armed prophet held illimitable

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Robert Graves of May 21, 1921. Graves, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Graves, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> His own expression, *S.P.*, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> *S.P.*, p. 477.

possibilities';<sup>1</sup> he would see where his possibilities might lead, but he was under no illusions as to the significance of the experiment: 'To the clear-sighted, failure was the only goal.

'We must believe, through and through, that there was no victory except to go down in death fighting and crying for failure itself.'<sup>2</sup> But there are sequels even to failure, and sequels, as he knew, were rotten things.

<sup>1</sup> S.P., p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> S.P., p. 422.

## CHAPTER 5

### *The Unmaking of the Sykes-Picot Agreement*

#### I

ON December 6, 1917, Jamal Pasha, in a speech at Beirut, published to the Muslim world the provisions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement which the Soviet Government had just disclosed.<sup>1</sup> Jamal Pasha taunted Husain, now King of the Hijaz, with his dependence on the enemies of Islam, who were plotting, as the Agreement showed, the dismemberment of its body politic. He pronounced Husain responsible for the disasters which were befalling Islam in the War. Jamal's speech came at a delicate juncture of events. The year 1917 had been a bad one for the Allies and had ended with the defection of Russia. The only striking military successes had been the occupation of Baghdad, and Allenby's offensive in Palestine in October and November culminating in the capture of Jerusalem on December 3. The situation which the Sharifians confronted was painfully obscure. The general progress of the War gave no clear indication of the eventual success of the side they had chosen. In spite of their losses, the Ottomans gave no sign, as yet, of abandoning the struggle. They and the Germans were increasing their efforts to detach the Sharifians from the Entente. Abbas Hilmi, ex-Khedive of Egypt, came to Syria, and 'a pro-Arab, pan-Islamic propaganda was inaugurated'<sup>2</sup>; the Germans founded an Arab Bureau in Damascus in October;<sup>3</sup> and finally, Jamal Pasha, before making his speech in Beirut, sent a message to Faisal to apprise him of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and to propose an accommodation. Whether Husain considered Jamal's terms unsatisfactory, whether he felt powerless to escape from his involvement with the Entente Powers, or whether the British discovered the negotiations and he had to put the best face he could on them, it is not possible to say; but he sent Jamal's letter to Cairo as proof of his good faith. What he told Cairo

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Qibla*, the official newspaper of the Hijaz published in Mecca, in no. 188 of Ramadan 2, 1336/June 11, 1918, gave the date and text of Jamal's speech. It did not comment on the portion of Jamal's speech dealing with the Agreement. Antonius, pp. 255-6, gives extracts from the speech.

<sup>2</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of March 4, 1918.

<sup>3</sup> Antonius, p. 227; Tahsin al-Askari, vol. I, pp. 168-9.

is not known, but the English answer dated February 8, 1918, has been published.<sup>1</sup> The answer thanked Husain for the 'loyal motives' which made him disclose Jamal's approach; but it referred only obliquely to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which Jamal was using so skilfully to compel the Sharifians to surrender. 'The Turkish Policy', the answer said, 'is to create dissension by luring the Arabs into believing that the Allied Powers have designs on the Arab countries, and by representing to the Allies that the Arabs might be made to renounce their aspirations' and it proceeded to affirm the determination of the Allies 'to stand by the Arab peoples in their struggle for the establishment of an Arab world in which law shall replace Ottoman injustice, and in which unity shall prevail over the rivalries artificially provoked by the policy of Turkish officials.' The reply was, no doubt, meant to restore the King's confidence, inevitably shaken by Jamal's attacks on him as an enemy of Islam.

Jamal expected these attacks to rally the Muslims of Syria and elsewhere to the support of the Ottoman state. Anti-European and, in particular, anti-French sentiment among the Muslims of Syria, as Yale pointed out in October 1917, was long-standing and had been, for years, carefully fostered by Ottoman propaganda: 'The Turks,' Yale wrote, 'realising the growing influence of France in Mount Lebanon, and fearing that the time might come when the French might seize not only Mount Lebanon, but all Syria, endeavoured to counteract the prestige of the French. By means of a judicious propaganda throughout Syria, the ignorant and fanatical Muslims were made to look upon France as the great enemy of Islam. The Muslim Arabs were led to believe that a French occupation in Syria would entail wholesale persecutions of the Moslems and a determined effort to convert them to Christianity. . . . The effects of this policy,' Yale concluded, 'are still in evidence to-day.'<sup>2</sup> This was what made Jamal's revelations so dangerous to the Sharifian cause. The seriousness with which they were regarded may be gauged from the attempts of the English officials in Cairo to disarm Ottoman and German propaganda by disowning, as will be seen later, the Sykes-Picot Agreement.<sup>3</sup> Another token of the depth of sentiment to which Jamal appealed among the Muslims in Syria may be found in the success of the Sharifians, when they were installed in

<sup>1</sup> A translation from the Arabic version, printed in Amin Sa'id, vol. I, pp. 314-15, appears in Antonius, pp. 431-2.

<sup>2</sup> Y.P.II., Yale's report of October 29, 1917.

<sup>3</sup> A report of March 2, 1918, in *The Milner Papers*, indicates that both Clayton, the Chief Political Officer of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, and Wingate, the High Commissioner in Egypt, were preoccupied with Syrian Muslim feeling on this question.



Damascus, in using this legacy of Abdul Hamid's pan-Islamic propaganda as a weapon in their struggle against the French.

The message of February 8 was vague and non-committal, and, if it was a reply to a protest by the King of the Hijaz that he had been kept ignorant of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, curiously unsatisfactory. But did Husain protest? Then, if so, it is even more curious to note that about the time of this alleged protest, in January 1918, Hogarth reminded the King 'of proviso in original Agreements safeguarding special interests of our Allies and especially France,' and that the King did not demur to Hogarth's claim, but merely made a joke about Fashoda.<sup>1</sup>

It is also curious to note the change in the reward which the British Government held out to the King, in the event of victory. At the beginning of the War, in Kitchener's time, it had been the independence of Arabia together with the caliphate; now, it was 'the establishment of an Arab world . . . in which unity shall prevail over the rivalries artificially provoked by the policy of Turkish officials'; a month earlier, the message sent with Hogarth spoke of the determination of the Allies to see that 'the Arab race shall be given full opportunity of once again forming a nation in the world.'<sup>2</sup> Such declarations, whatever their exact meaning, or their possible bearing on the post-War settlement, at least reveal the manner in which those who, like Sykes in London and the staff of the Arab Bureau in Cairo,<sup>3</sup> were responsible for Eastern policy or could influence it in the making, tended to think of the Middle-Eastern settlement.

Sykes's vision of Oriental history conflicted with the assumptions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Others disliked the Agreement because they were doctrinaire Liberals who thought that the world should be composed of small sovereign nations living side by side in amity; others again, because they feared a French foothold in the Levant; still others because of a personal involvement in the cause of Arab nationalism. All these tendencies may be seen in the words and deeds of members of the Arab Bureau. The Bureau had its own views on the conduct of the War in the East, and these views had corollaries relating to the nature of the ensuing peace settlement. A note, dating from the first quarter of 1916, written by Wyndham Deedes, who was then a member of the Bureau, gives an idea of these views. The note refers to the attitude of the Government of India who were responsible for the Mesopotamian campaign: 'If on the other hand,' wrote Deedes, 'they are now prepared to consider the whole question of putting into operation Arab co-operation, such as has been proposed to

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 5964, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 3 above, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Founded, it seems, by Sir Mark Sykes; see Christopher Sykes, p. 182.

us very often by the Aziz Party<sup>1</sup> and such as we have been trying for months to get the War Office to accept, in that they must be prepared to make certain concessions *now* to the Arab party and make certain promises for the future, in which case we said we would get to work so as to see what mutual arrangements could be made. . . .<sup>2</sup> These mutual arrangements were not those envisaged in the Sykes-Picot Agreement which was then being negotiated. At the time it proved possible to convince neither the Government of India nor the Government in London. As late as April 1917, we know, the British Government were decided, as they informed Sir Percy Cox, Chief Political Officer in Mesopotamia, to carry out the Sykes-Picot Agreement.<sup>3</sup>

It was about that time that the fortunes of the Agreement began to decline and the new notions to gain ground. For it was precisely on the occasion of the fall of Baghdad in March 1917, that the Government authorised the issue of the proclamation written by Sykes,<sup>4</sup> inviting the people of Baghdad to 'unite with your kinsmen in the North, East, South and West.' From then onwards, the indications multiply that the men on the spot, the experts, and perhaps the politicians in London, came to think of the Sykes-Picot Agreement as inadequate and unworkable. In January and February 1918, the Hogarth message and the note from the Foreign Office spoke of the determination of the Allies to realise Arab 'Unity'; in July 1918, the Military Governor of Jerusalem, at a celebration of the birthday of King George 'proclaimed that the Arab Movement would bring back the ancient lustre of past Arab greatness. He then touched upon the excellent performance of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" given for the Arab volunteers by the Muktataf ed-Darus [*sic*], and quoted the famous epigram "To be or not to be! that is the question." He applied this saying to the Arab Nation, and said that the Arab Nation will become great or remain lowly in proportion to her efforts during the present opportunity.'<sup>5</sup> The Sharifians, of course, read into these manifestations evidence that the officials of the British Government would take up their cause against France. The encourag-

<sup>1</sup> Aziz Ali, who was the leader of the Arab officers' secret society, see chapter 2 above.

<sup>2</sup> J. Presland, pseud., p. 251.

<sup>3</sup> P. Graves, *The Life of Sir Percy Cox*, n.d., [1941], p. 219. See also Colonel House's report of his conversation with Balfour on April 28, 1917. House reported Balfour as saying that 'They have agreed to give Russia a sphere of influence in Armenia and the northern part. The British take in Mesopotamia and the region which is contiguous to Egypt. France and Italy each have their spheres. . . . C. Seymour, ed., *Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, 1928, vol. III, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 3 above, pp. 79-80.

<sup>5</sup> *The Arab Bulletin*, no. 97, July 16, 1918.

ing signs were not perhaps limited to formal communications and festive oratory: 'It may be said,' remarks Yale in a report of April 1918, 'that there are tales of the British officers charged with handling the Arabs having stimulated Emir Faisal to action by telling him that if he did not hasten to move against the Turks, the French would do so.'<sup>1</sup> After the capture of Aqaba in July 1917, Lawrence perceived great opportunities in the contact now established with the main battlefield;<sup>2</sup> in March 1918, 'Major Lawrence states that the Arabs have no faith,' so Yale reports, 'in the word of England and of France, and that they believe only such territory as they are able to secure by force of arms will belong to them. . . . Emir Faisal, it is hoped by Major Lawrence, will soon make a triumphal entry into Jerusalem.'<sup>3</sup> The Sharifians were not wrong in counting on the support of some officials at least to oppose the Sykes-Picot arrangement. In May 1918, Clayton was informing the Foreign Office that the Sykes-Picot Agreement was completely out of date,<sup>4</sup> and 'it was . . . confidently believed,' says Hogarth in an article of 1920, discussing the events of the last year of the War, 'that the 1916 Agreement was destined, for various reasons, not to be pressed by the surviving parties.'<sup>5</sup>

The Sharifians were to receive a striking indication of the new state of affairs. *Al-Qibla*, it has been seen, printed Jamal's speech of December 1917 only in June 1918, seven months after its delivery; it reproduced the speech, so it stated, from *al-Mustaqbal*, an Arabic newspaper published in Paris in the French interest. *Al-Mustaqbal* may have published Jamal's speech in order, perhaps, to discredit the Sharif, or perhaps, to give, obliquely, public notice of the French claims in the Levant. Such a move could not be left unanswered, and Husain therefore protested to the High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Reginald Wingate, that he knew nothing of the purported arrangements just revealed, and asked for information on the alleged treaty between England, France and Russia.<sup>6</sup> Husain's indignation was perhaps feigned. The article in *al-Mustaqbal* must have revealed nothing new to him; this protest was superfluous now, if he had really protested when Jamal first sent him details of the Sykes-Picot Agreement at the end of November 1917; and he could have protested, but did not, when Hogarth reminded him in January 1918 of the special interests of France in Syria. Did he protest now because he knew that his protest

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of April 1, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> S.P., p. 281.

<sup>3</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of March 11, 1918.

<sup>4</sup> *The Milner Papers*.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Burden of Syria,' *Nineteenth Century and After*, February 1920.

<sup>6</sup> Husain's protest is dated June 5; Y.P.I., 'British Commitments to King Husain.'

would fall on favourable ears? He could, in any case, proclaim his ignorance of the Agreement with a show of plausibility, since its provisions had been conveyed to him verbally. At the time of Sykes's and Picot's visit to Jadda in May 1917 Lawrence had reported the Sharif to remark how short and informal the conversations were, and how there were no written documents. According to the Sharif the discussions had resulted in the French abandoning the idea of annexing any part of Syria but this, the Sharif said, was not embodied in a treaty: he was satisfied with Picot's declaration that the status of Syria would be similar to that of Mesopotamia.<sup>1</sup>

The answer which Husain received from Wingate must have gratified him exceedingly. Wingate, replying on June 8, assured Husain that the documents published by the Bolsheviks 'do not constitute an actually concluded agreement but consist of records of provisional exchanges and conversations between Great Britain, France and Russia.' Wingate went on to say that Jamal, in giving publicity to the agreement, 'has . . . ignored the fact that the subsequent outbreak and the striking success of the Arab Revolt, as well as the withdrawal of Russia, had long ago created an altogether different situation.'<sup>2</sup> In this manner, the confidence of the English officials in Cairo that the Sykes-Picot Agreement would 'not be pressed by the surviving parties' was communicated to the King of the Hijaz. To him, who knew of the English arrangements with France, the meaning of Wingate's message must have been clear. The message meant that what Sykes had told him in May 1917 no longer held, that the English officials in Cairo, and perhaps the British Government itself, were disowning these arrangements. He had been right perhaps, after all, to remind Hogarth of Fashoda. Hogarth had then reported that he doubted whether Husain 'has any fixed plan or foresees his way,' but that he did not doubt 'that in his own mind he [Husain] abates none of his original demands on behalf of the Arabs, or in the fulness of time, of himself.'<sup>3</sup> It looked as if he had, at last, found a way to satisfy these demands. He could expect, if Wingate's message meant anything, to enjoy the support of England. It also looked as though he could count on the support of

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., 'British Commitments to King Hussein.' For Picot's declaration, see chapter 4, above.

<sup>2</sup> Antonius, p. 257, who translates from an Arabic version. Antonius is mistaken in making this document precede the note of February 8, 1918, mentioned above, and in implying that Balfour was responsible for it. Abdullah, in a letter published in *al-Ahram*, Cairo, on August 7, 1937, quotes this message, attributes it to Wingate, and dates it June 8, 1918; see Rossi, pp. 43-4. It appears from *The Milner Papers* that he is correct, both in the attribution and the dating of the document.

<sup>3</sup> Cmd. 5964 (1939), p. 5.

another Power. His Cairo Agent, al-Faruqi, had cabled him on June 9, 1917, that he understood from Dr Sarruf, the part-owner of *al-Muqattam* newspaper, that the United States, were likely to oppose French plans in Syria. Husain had then hastened to ask his Agent to make it known to the American people that 'His Sacred Majesty the King thanked [them] and that he now knew that human beings were endowed with more perfections than he had imagined, and that his realisation of the existence of such high sentiments doubled his thankfulness to the Creator.'<sup>1</sup>

Wingate's telegram of June 8, 1918, was direct and unambiguous in disowning the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The document known as *The Declaration to the Seven*, issued in July 1918, disowns the Agreement by implication, but disowns it nonetheless. The Declaration, it is true, was directed not so much against the Agreement itself as against the ambitions of Husain. The seven Syrians to whom it is addressed<sup>2</sup> were members of a party formed in Cairo in 1918, the Party of Syrian Unity. This Party, says Amin Sa'id, 'included a number of men who had worked long and well for the Arab cause and who had gradually dissociated themselves from Husain in the first two years of the Revolt, owing to the inflexibility and obstinacy they encountered in him, and to his disinclination to listen to the advice of those qualified to give it.'<sup>3</sup> Having no doubt learnt that the territories which they claimed as Arab would be divided between England and France, and fearing that the King of the Hijaz would acquiesce, for the sake of his own position, in this arrangement, they determined to make an independent approach to the British authorities.<sup>4</sup> They wrote a memorial setting out their hopes and fears, and delivered it to Mr Walrond, whose ear they had succeeded in gaining, to forward to Lord Milner with whom Walrond was in direct correspondence.<sup>5</sup>

Walrond himself inclined to the views held by the seven Syrians. He believed that it was possible to form a number of democratic Muslim states out of the Ottoman territories in Asia, and that the King of the Hijaz

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence between Husain and al-Faruqi 18-19 Sha'ban 1335/June 9-10, 1917; al-Umari, vol. II, pp. 120-1.

<sup>2</sup> Their names are given in Antonius, p. 433 n.

<sup>3</sup> Amin Sa'id, II, part I, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence called them 'an unauthorised committee of seven Gothamites' (S.P., 572). As they were opposed to the King of the Hijaz, the reason for his displeasure with them is obvious.

<sup>5</sup> Amin Sa'id, II, part I, p. 38. Main Swete Osmond Walrond (1870-1927); educated at Harrow and Balliol College, Oxford; Egyptian Civil Service, 1894-7; Private Secretary to Lord Milner in South Africa, 1897-1905; employed in the Arab Bureau, 1917-18; acted as adviser, in a private capacity, to Milner's mission to Egypt, 1920-1. His recreations, it is recorded in *Who's Who*, were the problems of the Near East and the study of Arabic.

was not a suitable leader for the Arabs. 'In discussing possible solutions of the Syrian and Arab questions,' writes Yale in a report of April 15, 1918, 'Mr Walrond mentioned the possibility of an independent Arab Empire composed of loosely joined confederated states embracing Irak, Syria and Arabia. He stated that for some time now he had been encouraging the more religious Syrian Moslems in this line and that he had been leading them to think in terms of an Arab State or Confederacy of States. He went on to say that he was supplying them with such materials as the constitution of the United States, of the Federal Republic of Switzerland, and other such documents of which also translations into the Arabic were being prepared.'<sup>1</sup>

The memorial was anonymous. The prudential reasons which dictated anonymity to the writers are easily understood. They were men who, compared to the King of the Hijaz, had little standing and authority; they were attacking the position of a potentate whom the British Government considered an ally; the means at the disposal of Husain to discredit and silence them were greater than those they could ever command to defend themselves; they were technically enemy aliens in Egypt and could easily be harmed, if authority esteemed their activities inexpedient. But 'His Majesty's Government,' the reply to their memorial in due course reassured them, 'fully appreciate the reasons why the memorialists desire to retain their anonymity.'<sup>2</sup>

The memorialists claimed Arabia, Syria, Iraq and part of the Mosul vilayet to be Arab countries. They asked for an assurance that the inhabitants of this region would enjoy 'complete independence'. But the crucial point of the memorial was a question: 'Is it the policy of the British Government to help the peoples of these countries to attain complete independence and to found a decentralised Arab Government similar to the government of the United States and other allied governments which are suitable to the nature of the populations, or does the British Government consider all the Arab countries in the same light?' The meaning of this question is clarified when the memorialists recur to the desire of the Syrians to enjoy administrative autonomy, and to their hope that a settlement on these lines will not prove unacceptable to the rulers of the Arabs, and then they point out that the Arab Revolt, though it began in the Hijaz, was really prepared and elaborated in Syria.<sup>3</sup> 'The Syrians,' they said, 'however much they would like to see Syria part of the allied Arab

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., Walrond's letters in *The Milner Papers* confirm Yale's account of his views.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 5964 (1939), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Amin Sa'id, II, part I, pp. 38-40, where the text of the memorial is given.

Kingdom, were, before the War, endeavouring to make Syria follow the principles of Decentralisation, and to divide it into administratively autonomous provinces. If the Arab countries gain their independence, this arrangement can be followed in all provinces and principalities.'

Read in the light of the memorial, the *Declaration to the Seven* takes on a different complexion. When it lays down that the government of territories freed from Turkish rule by Allied armies will be based upon the principle of the consent of the governed, the specific imposition from which it seeks to safeguard is that of Sharifian government. When it solemnly refers to obstacles which 'His Majesty's Government trust and believe that they can and will be overcome,' pledges 'all support to those who desire to overcome them'; when it declares the British Government 'prepared to consider any scheme of co-operation which is compatible with existing military operations', the obstacles to which it refers are not those arising from the fact of Ottoman occupation, but those arising from the views of the King of the Hijaz, and the schemes, 'compatible with existing military operations,' to which support is pledged, relate to the organisation of democratic government, free from Sharifian control. It is perhaps profitless to ask what manner of democratic organisation was envisaged, and who would carry on the orderly government of the United States of the Arab world. The fact remains that Hogarth and Walrond read the Declaration, said by Lawrence to be the work of Sykes,<sup>1</sup> to a delegate of the seven Syrians who were informed of 'the importance which His Majesty's Government attribute to the document, which the memorialists had presented. Why the Declaration was made is still not clear. It is possible that Walrond's ideas had something to do with it, and it may be that the need to counter German and Ottoman overtures may have also played a part. Rashid Rida, who belonged to the Party of Syrian Unity, in an article in *al-Manar* stated this to have been the motive of the Declaration,<sup>2</sup> but he may have considered it inexpedient to be more explicit; there is no doubt, however, that the desire to counter Ottoman propaganda was operative. 'Not only are the Syrian Arabs in Egypt greatly upset by this news [of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration],' Yale was writing in March 1918, 'and declared that it means the division of the Arab provinces between France and Great Britain; but they claim that the Arabs of Syria, east of the Jordan, in the Hauran and throughout Syria worked upon by the Turks, who, it is reported, have promised the Arab provinces autonomy and are returning

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, p. 281. Lawrence's letter to *The Times*, of September 8, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Manar*, vol. XXII, p. 461.

Arab exiles to Syria, are losing faith in the Allies and are unwilling to co-operate with them.

'They claim that, unless a clearer, less ambiguous statement be made by the Allies in regard to the future of Syria and Mesopotamia, the Arab tribes of the Irak and the Arabs of Syria as well as many of the tribes in Arabia, will be lost to the cause of the Allies and of the King of the Hedjaz.'<sup>1</sup>

The Declaration to the Seven, whatever its motive and purpose, conflicted with the Sykes-Picot Agreement. But it is not so much the principle of government by consent, to which the Declaration appealed, which clashed with the Agreement; this principle was invoked to reassure the petitioners against the King of the Hijaz. It was, of course, later argued, without regard to the purpose of the memorialists, that the principle of government by consent introduced by the Declaration, annulled the provisions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement.<sup>2</sup> But this aspect of the Declaration became important only later, when it was to be emphasised for polemical purposes. What at the time mattered was the ruling that it gave concerning one category of Ottoman territories, namely, 'Areas emancipated from Turkish control by the action of the Arabs themselves during the present war.' The Declaration laid it down that in such areas 'His Majesty's Government recognise the complete and sovereign independence of the Arabs inhabiting these areas and support them in their struggle for freedom.' This was in obvious contradiction to the provisions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, for the Arabs might 'emancipate' areas in which France's rights were recognised by England. But such a contradiction was not, in fact, allowed. The operation of the rule laid down in the Declaration, says Lawrence, 'was regulated locally by arrangement between Allenby and Faisal by which the Arab army operated almost entirely in the area given to the Arabs in [the Sykes-Picot Agreement]'.<sup>3</sup> Here, then, there was no formal contradiction. But a vital modification in the Sykes-Picot scheme had been, all the same, effected. In this scheme a territory had been assigned to the Arab state; but the state was to be set up and to operate under the supervision of France; such, for instance, had been Husain's understanding of the arrangement on the occasion when he was so pleased with having trapped Picot. The Declaration to the Seven made it seem as though the Arab government of the region of Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Damascus where, according to Lawrence, the Arab army was allowed to operate, could be totally independent of French control and French supervision, and that England would support such a state of

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of March 4, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Antonius, p. 273.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, p. 281.



affairs. In this belief the Sharifians entered on the last days of the War. It was on this question that they were later to be at issue with France. Wingate's message and the Declaration to the Seven led them to believe that they could count on British support in their quarrel. 'On the one hand,' Walrond told Yale in April 1918, 'we are conquering Palestine to give it to the French and on the other we are telling Emir Faisal and his Arabs to hurry up and take Damascus and that all that they get will be theirs.'<sup>1</sup> The date of the conversation is significant. The situation that Walrond described found official expression a few months later in the Declaration to the Seven, and the Declaration could carry so much conviction only because it recorded in black and white what was in the air quite a while before.

## II

The Sykes-Picot Agreement had provided for the formation of an Arab state or states in some of the territories of the Ottoman Empire in Asia, conditional on the Arabs obtaining the towns of Homs, Hama, Damascus and Aleppo. One of the areas set aside for this purpose was to be under the influence of England, and another under the influence of France. This influence was defined in the Sykes-Picot Agreement as 'priority of rights of enterprise and local loans,' and the exclusive right to supply advisers and civil servants to the respective state or states.

Towards the end of the War the Sharifians began to hope that these conditions might be modified to their advantage. Wingate's message of June 1918 gave them reason to think that English and French policies were diverging, and that England would not support France in carrying out the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The Declaration to the Seven made their advantage clear by its apparent concession that, in the areas captured by the Arabs, an independent government could be set up, unfettered by the control of a Great Power; not, as the Sykes-Picot Agreement stipulated, subject to the influence of France and Great Britain. The question remained whether the Sharifians would be able to capture anything single-handed.

A Sharifian force commanded by Faisal began operating outside the Hijaz after the capture of Aqaba in July 1917. It was styled the Northern Arab Army and was under Allenby's control. It was, of course, armed, supplied and financed from Allied, chiefly British sources; technical and operational matters were also supervised by British officers. The Northern

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of April 15, 1918.

Arab Army consisted of a regular force and of tribesmen enrolled by Faisal through their chiefs. The number of these varied considerably from place to place and time to time. Their enrolment must be regarded in most cases, more as a means of securing their goodwill than as an increase in the Sharifian fighting force. The tribesmen were unreliable, they had no staying power, and were easily distracted from military duties by the temptation of loot.<sup>1</sup> 'Our fighting,' said Lawrence to Robert Graves, 'was a luxury we indulged in only to save the Arab's self-respect.'<sup>2</sup> 'That the Hijaz bedouins were simply *guerrilleros*, and not good quality at that,' wrote Hogarth in May 1917, 'has been amply demonstrated, even in the early sieges; and it was never in doubt that they would not attack or withstand Turkish regulars unless these were at the last extremity.'<sup>3</sup>

As for the regular formations of the Northern Arab Army, estimates of their strength fluctuate somewhat, but one of the highest figures is that given by Brémont. He put their strength at three thousand men, all of them ex-Ottoman soldiers.<sup>4</sup> Walrond, writing to Milner at the end of June 1918, mentions a figure of fifteen hundred men. Sir Hubert Young, who was with the Northern Arab Army during the last months of the Palestinian and Syrian operations, wrote that 'the Sharifian regular detachment and attached units, in whom alone could any reliance be placed from the military point of view, and without whom the great raid could never have been achieved, numbered about six hundred men, with six guns and ten machine-guns,' and that 'but for Dawnay and Joyce [British officers attached to the Sharifians], only twenty or thirty Arab irregulars would have ridden with Allenby's cavalry into the Syrian capital instead of from six to seven hundred trained and equipped regular soldiers.'<sup>5</sup> Allenby used this Sharifian force for the harassment of the Ottoman lines of communication, and when the time for his last victorious offensive came, the force was detailed to engage and hamper the Ottoman troops whom Allenby had, by a tactical feint, lured east of the Jordan, away from the main field of battle.

This was the strength and nature of the army which was, according to Lawrence, 'to act as the right wing of the Allies in the conquest of Palestine and Syria'<sup>6</sup> and to secure, by force of arms, the territory of an Arab

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Lawrence's account of the capture of Wajh in January 1917, *S.P.*, pp. 168-9. And compare with the account given by C. E. Vickery, who directed the action against Wajh; C. E. Vickery, 'Arabia and the Hedjaz,' *Central Asian Society Journal*, vol. X, 1923, pp. 46-62.

<sup>2</sup> Graves, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> *The Arab Bulletin*, no. 52, May 31, 1917.

<sup>4</sup> Brémont, p. 274.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Hubert Young, *The Independent Arab*, 1933, pp. 243-4 and 163.

<sup>6</sup> *S.P.*, p. 281.

state, of which otherwise the Allies, he complained to Yale, would defraud the Arabs. And now here was the Declaration to the Seven, and its pledge that what the Arabs conquered, the Arabs would retain. Dar'a was the first place where the operation of the pledge was tested. Following the Ottoman rout, the Sharifians occupied the town on September 28, 1918, and immediately started setting up a government. Lawrence came to help: 'Then in an hour of talk I built up publicly a programme of what the situation would demand of them if they were not to lose hold. Poor Nasir [the Sharifian officer in charge] stared in bewilderment.'<sup>1</sup> A few hours after the Sharifian occupation, General Barrow arrived with an Indian contingent. He tried to occupy the railway station where the Sharifians were established; 'I refused this demand,' says Nuri al-Sa'id, 'whereupon an altercation arose and Lawrence intervened. From what went on between Lawrence and the commander of the [Indian] contingent, I understood that the British High Command had furnished Lawrence with a letter stating that whatever the regular Arab Army occupied would come under direct Arab administration.'<sup>2</sup> Lawrence was 'spiny and high' with Barrow and put him in his place; for he was armed with authority of which Barrow was unaware: 'Clayton did us this service, thinking we should deserve what we could assert.'<sup>3</sup> Brave, upstanding words.

Two days after the occupation of Dar'a, on September 30, the Allied armies were converging on Damascus, in close pursuit of the retreating enemy. These armies consisted of Australian and Indian divisions, together with a small French contingent, and Lawrence's Northern Arab army. The Australians, accompanied by the French contingent, constituted the vanguard of the pursuit. At 1 p.m. on September 30, the Australians and the French were nearly in the suburbs of the city. 'At this juncture,' records Pichon, an officer of the French contingent, 'an Australian officer arrives post-haste; he brings an order from General Onslow to Commandant Lebon, halting the advance.

'A little while later, another Australian officer sends on the following directive from GHQ: Whatever the state of the fighting, no troops may

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 656.

<sup>2</sup> Nuri al-Sa'id, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> *S.P.*, p. 658. Lawrence had been gazetted (Army List, August 1918) 'Deputy Military Governor, Class X Special Appointment'; see R. Aldington, *Lawrence of Arabia*, 1955, p. 250; this may have been the authority which he invoked against Barrow. General Barrow, however, in his autobiography, only mentions that the Sharifian troops were looting trains in Dar'a and killing off wounded Turkish soldiers, that he asked Lawrence to order the Sharifians off the trains, that Lawrence refused, and that thereupon, his Indians cleared the trains; G. de S. Barrow, *The Fire of Life*, 1942, p. 211.

enter Damascus without express orders.'<sup>1</sup> Massey, a newspaper correspondent accompanying the troops, confirms that special orders were given 'with regard to securing the Beirut railway, cutting telegraph lines, and avoiding entering Damascus, if that were possible.'<sup>2</sup> The reason for this proceeding was to give scope to the Northern Arab army to assert itself; this army was not only to deserve what it could assert, it also deserved to assert. 'He [Allenby] hoped we would be present at the entry, partly because he knew how much more than a mere trophy Damascus was to the Arabs: partly for prudential reasons'; if anyone resisted the Australians 'who might be forced, despite orders, to enter the town,' Lawrence explains, 'then it would spoil the future.'<sup>3</sup> Truly, 'what General Allenby could do was enough for his very greediest of servants.'<sup>4</sup>

'It was apparent,' Massey goes on, 'by three o'clock in the afternoon [of September 30] that, if Damascus was not surrendered, the city would not be entered that night for the Arab army was some distance away. . . .'<sup>5</sup> But it so happened that, in spite of all the precautions taken, Damascus was surrendered to the Australians and not to the Northern Arab army. The Third Australian Light Horse Brigade had been ordered to cut the enemy's retreat to Homs, and its commander found that he could not reach the Homs road, to the north-east of the city, from where he was on the north-west, without actually passing through Damascus. 'At 5 a.m. [of October 1] he began his hazardous move through the heart of the city to reach the position he was ordered to occupy on the road to Homs. . . . Riding up to the bridge beside the Victoria Hotel, Olden and Timperley were attracted by a great throng of people outside the Serai. Sword in hand, the Australians cluttered over the bridge, charged through the crowd, and pulled up in front of the building. . . .

'Early as was the hour—it was then between 6.30 and 7 a.m.—the hall was packed with notables. When the clamour caused by the appearance of the Australians was stilled, Emir Said advanced. Olden . . . told him that Damascus was surrounded and resistance was impossible; he next demanded an assurance that his troops would not be molested. . . . Emir Said with characteristic eastern dignity readily acquiesced. "In the name of the civil population of Damascus," he said, "I welcome the British army". He formally wrote out his assurances for Olden. . . .

'Soon after seven o'clock Wilson [the Australian Brigade Commander] was clear of the city and in vigorous pursuit of the enemy columns in

<sup>1</sup> Jean Pichon, *Sur la Route des Indes*, Paris, 1932, pp. 121-2.

<sup>2</sup> W. T. Massey, *Allenby's Final Triumph*, 1920, p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> S.P., p. 664.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>5</sup> Massey, p. 234.

flight towards Homs . . . he sent back no messenger and left no troops in the city, but went on after the enemy with every man in his brigade. When, therefore, soon after he had cleared the streets, Lawrence rode into the town with a few Arab horsemen on the heels of the advance guard of the 14th Cavalry Brigade, the Arabs believed that they shared with the Indians the honours of the first entry.<sup>1</sup>

'Damascus,' the official communique of October 2 said, 'surrendered at 6 a.m. yesterday. . . . On the morning of October 1st the town was entered by our mounted troops and the Arab Army. After guards had been posted, the troops were withdrawn from the town.'<sup>2</sup> It became therefore well-known that the Northern Arab army had captured Damascus. The pledge of the Declaration to the Seven had to be honoured, and the city was left to the Sharifians to administer. Major Young used to be asked afterwards whether it was the British army or Faisal who captured the city, and Sir Hubert used to answer 'that as Faisal had at least six hundred men with him and General Chauvel [the Commander of the Australians] not more than fifteen thousand, it did not seem to me that there could be any doubt about the reply.'<sup>3</sup>

It seems to have been widely known at the time that the Arab 'capture' of Damascus had been deliberately contrived. Kurd Ali, in his chronicle, says that the British army kept to the agreement with Faisal whereby his army would administer whatever it could occupy, 'and whenever the British army,' he goes on, 'captured a town or reduced a fortress which was to be given to the Arabs, it would halt until the Arabs could enter, and the capture would be credited to them.'<sup>4</sup> An officer who served on Allenby's staff in Palestine declared: 'I always held that we made a serious mistake when, on approaching Damascus, which the Turco-Germans had evacuated owing to the defeat inflicted upon them by British and Indian troops, we stopped the latter in order to enable the Arabs to enter Damascus first.'<sup>5</sup> Allenby, at a meeting of the Council of Four in Paris, on

<sup>1</sup> H. S. Gullett, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18*, vol. VII, *Sinai and Palestine*, Sydney, 1935, pp. 758-62.

<sup>2</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of November 9, 1918.

<sup>3</sup> Young, p. 277.

<sup>4</sup> Kurd Ali, p. 154.

<sup>5</sup> *The Near East*, January 9, 1920, quoting *The Glasgow Herald*, December 31, 1919. See also B. Willson, 'Our amazing Syrian Adventure' in *The National Review*, September 1920; and L. Thomas, *With Lawrence in Arabia*, 1926, p. 233: 'Fortunately for the Arabs, Allenby had ordered Light Horse Harry Chauvel to hold his Australians back and let Faisal's advance guard enter the city first'; in an elementary history textbook used in Lebanese schools, Allenby's decision is taken as common knowledge: see Umar abu al Nasr, *Surya wa Lubnan fi al qarn al Tasi' ashar (Syria and the Lebanon in the Nineteenth Century)*, Beirut, 1926, p. 96.

March 20, 1919, spoke in a manner which confirms these statements: 'Shortly after the capture of Damascus,' he said, 'Faisal had been allowed to occupy and administer the city.'<sup>1</sup>

It is still not known whose decision resulted in the delivery of Damascus to the Northern Arab Army, whether it was ordered from London, or whether Allenby himself, persuaded by Lawrence and his colleagues of the Arab Bureau, took it upon himself to achieve this result. It was a decision followed by momentous and far-reaching consequences. It persuaded the Sharifians and the populations of Syria, as no number of declarations would have done, that the might of the British Empire supported Faisal and his lieutenants. It made these unwilling to reach any accommodation with France, until an armed clash resulted; it involved England in a quarrel with France; it abandoned Damascus to licence for a day or two; it made possible the creation of a base, subsidised, armed and supported by England, from which the English position in Mesopotamia was continually subverted; and it exposed Syria to two years of unsettlement, misgovernment and violence. What is perhaps ultimately most important, it created the myth of an Arab Revolt, advancing in triumph and crowning its progress with the capture of a great city, only to be cheated of victory by underhand intrigues and sordid ambitions. The abandonment of Damascus to the Sharifians, and the version of the Arab Revolt spread by *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* are perhaps the two most important influences on Middle Eastern events in the years after 1918. Both were the result not of blind chance, but of the exercise of conscious human will.

The events which followed the occupation of the city by the Sharifians are confused and obscure. When the Australians marched through the city in the early morning of October 1, they found a committee of notables sitting in the municipality. This committee had taken over from the Ottomans, when these had, the day before, evacuated the city. It was headed by Amir Sa'id al-Jazairi who had immediately proclaimed the independence of Syria, hoisted the Sharifian flag, and assumed responsibility for order. It was therefore Amir Sa'id and his brother Amir Abd al-Qadir whom Lawrence found in control when he, with the Sharifian contingent and its Beduin and Druze appendages, followed the Australians into the city and took possession of it.

The rôle of the Jazairi brothers in the War is still by no means clear. They were the descendants of Amir Abd al-Qadir of Algeria who had led the

<sup>1</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, vol. V, Washington, 1946, p. 10.

indigenous resistance to the French occupation and had been captured, interned in France, and subsequently allowed to retire to Damascus, where he lived as a pensioner of the French government. Other Algerians, his followers and retainers, had settled in Damascus where they numbered, at the end of the War, according to Yale, from twelve to fifteen thousand men.<sup>1</sup> At the outbreak of war, the Jazairi family came under suspicion because of their French connexion. When Jamal began his repression of suspect elements in Syria, he hanged one of the family, Amir Umar, and exiled the rest to Broussa.<sup>2</sup> Later, in the autumn of 1917, when an Arab Bureau was established in Damascus and the Ottomans tried to tempt the Sharifians to their side, the Jazairi brothers, Sa'id and Abd al-Qadir, were released from the exile and used as go-betweens. Abd al-Qadir, according to Lawrence, 'had been enlarged by the Turks upon request by the Khedive Abbas Hilmi, and sent down by him on private business to Mecca.'<sup>3</sup> There is little doubt that the ex-Khedive's private business was negotiation on behalf of the Ottomans. Abd al-Qadir joined Faisal's force, offered the help of his Algerians, and took part in some operations. Lawrence portrays him as a madman, and his brother Sa'id as a 'low-browed degenerate with a bad mouth, . . . as devious as his brother, but less brave.' Both were 'religious fanatics of the most unpleasant sort, whose ideas were theological not logical.'<sup>4</sup> For reasons which Lawrence's abuse does nothing to clarify, Abd al-Qadir and Faisal parted company. Later, in August 1918, the Ottoman Command sent Sa'id with new offers to Faisal. The negotiations, as Lawrence recorded, were abortive. Later in *Seven Pillars* Abd al-Qadir appears as the defender of a village on behalf of the Ottomans, against the Sharifians,<sup>5</sup> and he is accused, on the word of Shukri al-Ayyubi, an officer in the Ottoman army who was a secret adherent to the Sharif, of having, together with his brother and followers 'alone of all Damascus . . . stood by the Turks till they saw them running' and of having, thereafter, 'burst in upon Faisal's committee where it sat in secret, and brutally assumed control.'<sup>6</sup>

Suddenly, then, the Jazairi brothers appeared as the partisans of the King of the Hijaz who proclaimed a government in his name, just as

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of December 18, 1918. This seems exaggerated; see J.-J. Rager, *Les Musulmans Algériens en France et dans les Pays Islamiques*, Paris, 1950, pp. 43ff.

<sup>2</sup> Of Amir Umar, *The Arab Bulletin*, no. 2, June 12, 1916, said that he was pro-English. The Amir figures in the list of Arab martyrs executed by the Young Turks, which the Sharif of Mecca drew up in his justificatory manifesto at the beginning of his rebellion.

<sup>3</sup> S.P., p. 398.

<sup>4</sup> S.P., p. 573, *Letters*, p. 257, S.P., p. 667.

<sup>5</sup> S.P., p. 648.

<sup>6</sup> S.P., pp. 666-7.

Damascus was falling into the hands of the Allies. Lawrence, immediately upon entering the city, decided to dismiss them. His reasons are still unknown, and what we know of the Amirs' history affords no guidance. Was he afraid that they would act in the French interest? Or that their authority in Damascus would rival that which he proposed to bestow on Faisal? Or was his enmity personal, dating from the time when Faisal was 'selling' him, and the Jazairis were the agents of the abortive transaction? It is, in any case, clear that the decision to set them aside was his own. Faisal's agent, the Sharif Nasir, looked on in bewilderment.<sup>1</sup> Having secured the support of some Ruwala tribesmen, Lawrence summoned the Jazairi brothers to his presence and evicted them from their functions. The meeting, he says, was stormy, and he 'was persuaded they should be seized and shot'; but he forebore, as he did not want to 'set the Arabs an example of precautionary murder as part of politics.'<sup>2</sup>

His prudential abstention proved useless; for, after he left Damascus, the Sharifians, in that very month of October, 1918, killed Abd al-Qadir. The circumstances and the reasons are again involved in ambiguity. An account in *The Times* of September 4, 1919, 'From a Correspondent', possibly Lawrence or one of his friends, after asserting that the Jazairi brothers had been plotting in Damascus, went on: 'Abdel Kader was, however, too impatient to be a good conspirator. Before his train was laid he took arms and galloped down the streets to Faisal's house and fired shot after shot at the door shouting to him to come out and meet him. The sentry took cover for a time, but at last lost patience and put a bullet from his rifle through Abdel Kader's head.' Yale's version of the affair is different. 'In Damascus,' he wrote in his report of December 18, 1918, 'Emir Abdel Kader, the brother of Emir Said al-Jazairi, was assassinated in the streets by Cherifian troops. It appears that Emir Faisal, at the instance of Ali Pasha el Rakabi, the Governor of Damascus, requested permission of General Allenby to arrest the two brothers on the ground that he could not guarantee security if these two 'Algerians' were not under arrest.

'When the military police arrived at the house of the Abdel Kader brothers, Emir Said gave himself up, while Emir Abdel Kader refused to surrender saying he would ride to the British commander and surrender himself to the British. He jumped upon his horse and was shot down by a cordon of mounted police who were drawn up with their rifles loaded. There was a general shooting match and some fifteen or twenty persons were hit and several killed.' Yale went on to speculate about the causes of

<sup>1</sup> S.P., pp. 670-1.

<sup>2</sup> S.P., p. 677.



the incident: '... by some it is said that Emir Faisal feared the influence of the two brothers. By others it is stated that Emir Said and Emir Abdel Kader were working in conjunction with the French. Still others contend that the two brothers were enemies of the Cherifian Governor Ali Pasha Rikabi. This riddle has not as yet been solved.' Yale pointed out that the brothers had welcomed the Sharifians when they entered Damascus and concluded: 'It is probable that jealousy and personal enmity had a great deal to do with this assassination.'<sup>1</sup>

Lawrence had made himself responsible for order in Damascus, and dissuaded the Australian commander from stationing any of his troops in the city.<sup>2</sup> On October 1, he deposed the Jazairi brothers and appointed men of his own choosing. But the situation was not under his control. 'At 10 o'clock the morning of the 1st of October,' writes Yale, 'I entered Damascus. The Cherifian (Arab) flag was then flying on the Government Buildings, and Cherifian flags were displayed in all parts of the city. . . .

'All day and night Bedouins and Druzes flowed into the city bent on enjoying the conquest and accumulating loot. British troops remained outside the city.'<sup>3</sup> 'In the streets,' says Massey, 'the citizens beat the Turkish soldiery and jeered at them . . . and probably many of the dead Turks in Damascus were massacred by their former Arab comrades and by civilians.' 'I witnessed,' he again says, 'many instances of the fear of Turkish soldiers. Small groups of them assembled in dark corners of the street waiting for an opportunity to give themselves up. They were usually without arms, which had been taken from them by the civilian population, and their personal belongings had likewise gone.' And again, 'There were people carrying weapons who had never been trained to arms, and their haphazard way of using them against anybody and anything, on no pretext whatever, was alarming to the authority installed to preserve the peace. Children were out with rifles. I saw a boy who could not have been more than twelve try to pull something from beneath a Druse's rough robe. The man cuffed the boy's ear, whereupon the child raised a rifle and fired into the man's stomach, and was knocked over by the recoil.'<sup>4</sup> During the night of October 1-2, looting by the Bedouins and the Druzes began. In his account, Lawrence attributes the disorders to the machinations of the disgruntled Abd al-Qadir among the Druzes, 'for whose tardy services I had this night sharply refused reward.'<sup>5</sup> But the

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., Hanna abu Rāshid in *Jabal al-Druze (The Mountain of the Druzes)*, Cairo, 1925, p. 101, ascribes the killing to political reasons, and states that Amir Sa'id accused Ali Rida al-Rikabi, the Governor of Damascus, of instigating it.

<sup>2</sup> S.P., p. 668.

<sup>3</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of November 9, 1918.

<sup>4</sup> Massey, pp. 257-63.

<sup>5</sup> S.P., p. 675.

Druzes had come into Damascus as part of the Sharifian force, following an agreement between Faisal and the Druze leader Husain al-Atrash, granting autonomy to the Druzes in return for their aid.<sup>1</sup> Lawrence had assumed responsibility for order, and it was for him to control his forces. There had already been in the morning a brush between the Druze leader Sultan al-Atrash and the Beduin chief Auda abu Tayi,<sup>2</sup> and it may perhaps be doubted whether Abd al-Qadir would have accomplished anything—assuming that he had a hand in the disturbance—if the city had not been occupied by a lawless and uncontrollable mob. The trouble-makers could not be tackled in the darkness. 'The morning of October 2, pandemonium broke loose in Damascus. The Beduins, who had been looting Turkish stores and hospitals and even the municipal stores, attempted to escape from the city with their loot and plunder. A cordon of Cherifian guards armed with rifles and automatic rifles and assisted by many civilians carrying rifles and other hand arms was formed at the crossing of the three principal streets leading out of town in order to intercept the looters.'<sup>3</sup> One particularly gruesome incident was the looting of the Turkish hospital. It contained between six and eight hundred wounded. The inmates were maltreated, and a few were massacred.<sup>4</sup>

'... [When] riding through Damascus the day after the city was taken, we passed the hospital and saw a considerable number of naked corpses piled in the courtyard in heaps, five or six feet high, apparently—from their condition—comparatively recently dead and thrown from the windows of the upper storey.

'It was not surprising,' Colonel Elphinston, who was an Indian Army officer, continued his recollection, 'that such a sight gave rise to considerable comment. . . .'<sup>5</sup> In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* Lawrence contrives to give the impression that the pitiable state of the Turkish soldiers in the hospital was solely due to neglect by their own army. When he heard about the state of the barracks hospital, he went over to investigate and found Australian sentries posted. 'They had orders to keep out all natives lest they massacre the patients—a misapprehension of the Arab fashion of making war.'<sup>6</sup>

From Elphinston's words and Lawrence's mention of the Australian sentries, it is clear that on October 2, the Australians went into Damascus. They did so, it seems, at Lawrence's request: 'The people,' says Massey, speaking of the events of the morning of October 2, 'might easily have

<sup>1</sup> Hanna abu Rāshid, pp. 94-5.

<sup>2</sup> S.P., p. 667.

<sup>3</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of November 9, 1918.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Royal Central Asian Society Journal*, vol. XXXI, part I, 1944, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> S.P., p. 676.

got completely out of hand, but just when the situation appeared to be getting very alarming. Colonel Lawrence, who fortunately was in the hotel, borrowed a piece of paper from me and wrote a request that some British troops might be sent into the city. In a short time there was a squadron of Australian Light Horse in the Hedjaz railway station. They galloped in and, as if by the touch of a magician's wand, the trouble ceased.<sup>1</sup> Yale, too, remarked on the change brought about by the entry of the British army into the city. 'This display of force,' he said in his report of November 9, 1918, 'had a salutary effect upon the inhabitants of the city.'<sup>2</sup> 'The march,' remarked the British official history, 'had an extraordinary effect upon the excited and unruly populace.'<sup>3</sup> *Seven Pillars* is more discreet: 'When things began I had called up Chauvel, who at once offered his troops. I thanked him, and asked that a second company of horse be drafted to the Turkish barracks (the nearest post) to stand by against call; but the fighting was too petty for that call.'<sup>4</sup> 'But,' Lawrence was to remark to Graves a few years later, 'I was on thin ice when I wrote the Damascus chapter and anyone who copies me will be through it, if he is not careful. *S.P.* is full of half-truth: here.'<sup>5</sup>

The following day, October 3, Allenby came to visit the captured city, and Faisal by special train from Dar'a to enter upon his new authority. On October 4, Faisal issued a manifesto informing the Syrians that 'an absolutely independent Arab constitutional government embracing all Syria has been formed in the name of our Sovereign Lord Sultan Husain.'<sup>6</sup> This step was presumably taken with Allenby's approval.<sup>7</sup> But it entailed nonetheless, a departure from what, up to then, had been Allenby's practice. 'His policy,' his biographer writes, 'was to administer [Palestine], so far as possible, strictly under international rules for enemy territory occupied in war. . . . This, Allenby considered, precluded any special privileges being accorded for Jewish settlement until the Peace Conference had given their decision.'<sup>8</sup> The principle that he followed here was to preserve the *status quo* on the ground that a military authority cannot

<sup>1</sup> Massey, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> Yale speaks of the British troops going into Damascus on October 3. But this is obviously a slip.

<sup>3</sup> Cyril Falls, *Military Operations, Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*, Vol. II, 1930, p. 593.

<sup>4</sup> *S.P.*, p. 675.

<sup>5</sup> Graves, p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> Text cited in Sati' al-Husri, *Yaum Maisalun (The Battle of Maisalun)*, Beirut, 1948, p. 194.

<sup>7</sup> He reported the setting up of this administration in a telegram to London of October 6. *The Milner Papers*.

<sup>8</sup> A. P. Wavell, *Allenby, Soldier and Statesman*, 1945, p. 261.

prejudge a political settlement. But this principle he did not follow in Damascus. 'No steps,' wrote Yale, 'were taken to annul the declarations that Houssein was King of Syria, and the Cherifian flag was allowed to float over the Government Buildings. In fact General Allenby tacitly, if not actually, recognised the Cherifian Government and the assumption by Houssein of the title of Houssein, the First, King of Syria and Hedjaz.' 'General Buckley, the Brigadier General of Intelligence with the British Forces in Palestine and Syria maintains,' Yale went on, 'that the C.-in-C. as he appointed British officers to posts in Palestine, and French officers to posts along the littoral, so appointed Cherifian officers in Syria. General Buckley informs me that General Allenby is in supreme command and that Syria, Mount Lebanon and Palestine are occupied enemy's territory and as such are under the military government of General Allenby. Buckley had no remarks to make when it was pointed out to him that the Cherifian flag floats in the towns east of the Jordan and at Damascus, while the British flag does not fly in Palestine nor the French flag in Mount Lebanon and at Beirut. When his attention was called to the fact that Houssein had been officially proclaimed by the Cherifian Government at Damascus to be King of Syria, General Buckley remarked that he was not aware of this fact. This was on the 16th of October at General Headquarters.' 'Captain Coulondre maintains,' Yale also reported, 'that whatever may be the ultimate government established in Syria no flag should fly there at the present time. . . . He demands by what right is the King of the Hedjaz permitted to hoist the Cherifian flag at Damascus and other towns and claim Syria as belonging to him.'<sup>1</sup> This question put by the French liaison officer, and the contradictory answers which the different parties gave to it, constituted the Syrian question for the two years which followed.

### III

After the capture of Damascus, Allenby recognised an Arab Government in the areas called A and B in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which had been reserved for an Arab state or confederation of states. In so doing he may be thought to have merely put into operation the provisions of the Agreement, and to have fulfilled McMahon's pledges to the Sharif. But the situation was actually more complex. The state to be established in area A was to be under the protection or the influence of France, and that to be established in area B. under the protection or influence of England. The manner in which this vague general provision was to be

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of November 9, 1918.

implemented was not at all clear. How was the state or confederation of states to stand in relation to England and France? What were to be the duties and obligations of the respective parties? These questions could only be settled after detailed negotiations. Allenby's action prejudged the issue in favour of the Sharifians. Faisal was allowed to proclaim an independent Arab government. When the French came, as they were bound, to assert their claim, Faisal and his supporters thought, not unnaturally, that they could count on British support to resist them. In this the Sharifians proved mistaken, but the circumstances attending their establishment at Damascus had not led them to think that they would be mistaken.

The English attitude towards the French claim in Syria justified Faisal in persisting in his mistake. When the British army was on the point of entering Syria an Anglo-French convention was signed in London regulating the relations between Allenby and the political agents of France in the Levant. This convention laid down that in any area of French interest occupied by the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, Allenby was to appoint the French representative as his Chief Political Adviser, and in particular that the French representative was to act, subject to the Commander-in-Chief's authority, as intermediary between any Arab authority which might be set up in area A and the Commander-in-Chief. Military questions were, of course, outside the province of the French representative, but his authority was diminished and could, in certain circumstances, be totally ignored, by the effect of another provision of the convention ruling that direct access to the Commander-in-Chief was open to any person, and that the Commander-in-Chief would communicate subsequently any official conversation on political matters which he may have held with any person approaching him.<sup>1</sup> The standing of the French representative was as vague as the provisions of the convention were elastic. Faisal was established with a territorial and military authority, he could fly the Sharifian flag, and he claimed to administer Syria on behalf of the King his father. As the Commander of an Allied force, he was, in military matters, responsible to Allenby who, as Commander-in-Chief, exercised supreme authority over all occupied territory. This meant that it was Allenby who could act as intermediary between the French representative and Faisal, rather than the reverse. Allenby could, when he chose, interpose his authority between his two subordinates: Faisal and the French representative. The latter according to this convention, was to be invested

<sup>1</sup> The provisions of the convention are described in R. de Gontaut-Biron, *Comment la France s'est installée en Syrie (1918-19)*, Paris, 1923, pp. 65-6. The convention is dated September 30, 1918.

with some of the Commander-in-Chief's authority in respect of area A, but in the same area Allenby recognised Faisal as the highest authority in military and administrative matters;<sup>1</sup> Faisal could, therefore, appeal to him against any demand by the French which he may have wanted to resist.

Allenby's attitude to the two contenders may be illustrated by his reaction to an incident arising out of the occupation of Beirut. Beirut fell in the blue area which the Sykes-Picot Agreement allowed France to annex. The convention of September 30, ruled that in this area the French representative would have the responsibility, subject to the Commander-in-Chief's supervision, of setting up a provisional civil administration. After the occupation of Damascus, however, Faisal dispatched emissaries to the different towns on the coast evacuated by the Ottomans in order to take them over before the arrival of Allied troops. He did this in order to stake a claim of prior occupation and therefore bring the pledge of the Declaration to the Seven into operation. But as this pledge was not meant to apply outside the area assigned to the Arab states in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and as the French protested, Faisal's emissaries were ousted, and the towns where they proclaimed their authority were occupied and administered by French troops and officers. Beirut was one of the places where Faisal sent his emissary to forestall the French. Whereupon Captain Coulondre, who was attached to the Sharifians in Damascus, protested to Faisal. Allenby took this in bad part, considering that the occupation of Beirut was a military and not a political question, and he also laid down the rule, contrary to the convention of September 30, that the French liaison officer could approach Faisal only through him.<sup>2</sup> When, however, Faisal appointed a governor for another town in the area Ladhikiya, which, according to the Agreement was to fall to France, Allenby approved his action not because this was a military question, but because Faisal's régime was, according to Allenby, acceptable to the people of Ladhikiya and the imposition of any régime not acceptable to them might, Allenby held, be difficult.<sup>3</sup> Later, in a meeting of the Council of Four in Paris, in March 1919, when the Syrian question was discussed in Allenby's presence, he had this explanation to offer of the incident at Beirut in the previous October. 'A little later,' Allenby is reported to have said, 'after the setting up of the military administration in these regions, General Allenby had put French administrators in the blue areas. When they arrived Emir Faisal had said that he would not retain the command

<sup>1</sup> Allenby's telegram of October 21, 1918. *The Milner Papers*.

<sup>2</sup> Allenby's telegram of October 7, 1918. *The Milner Papers*.

<sup>3</sup> Allenby's telegram of October 21, 1918. *The Milner Papers*.

of the Arab army if France occupied the ports. He had said that it meant that he was occupying a house without a door, and it would be said that he had broken faith with the Arab nation. Faisal had originally asked if he could occupy Beirut and the ports. General Allenby had replied in the affirmative, but had told him he must withdraw when the Allied armies came along, and he had done so. To Faisal's protest against the occupation by the French of places in the blue zone, General Allenby had replied that he himself was in charge of the administration, as Commander-in-Chief, and that the French officers, appointed as administrators, must be regarded, not as French officers, but as Allied military officers. Faisal had then said that he would admit it for the present, but would it last forever? General Allenby had replied that the League of Nations intended to give the small nations the right of self-determination. Faisal had insisted that "if put under French control" he would oppose to the uttermost. General Allenby had replied that at present there was no French control, but only the control of the Allies, and that eventually Faisal's rights would be considered.<sup>1</sup> What is most noteworthy in Allenby's language is his insistence to Faisal that no French claim was finally acknowledged, that the French were in the Levant not in virtue of any previous arrangement, but for the convenience of the military administration. To Faisal, who knew what the French claims were, and who seemed himself firmly settled in Damascus, this language could only hold out hopes that he might yet succeed in eliminating the French from the Levant altogether.

But why, it may be asked, did Allenby hold such a language? It is possible that he and those who guided him did not believe in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The convictions of Sir Mark Sykes, the predilections of Lawrence and of the Arab Bureau all went against such a scheme. But it must not be assumed that there was a precise, clear cut and official policy designed to eliminate France from the Levant and to set up an Arab state independent of French influence. Such a strategy is not to be discerned. There were convictions, predilections, and men acting haphazardly according to whatever conviction or predilection moved them. The energetic impulse of an intelligent purpose did not emanate from the centre of affairs to check the movements of subordinates and control their decisions. So that Yale's observation made at the end of the war in the East is largely true: 'the real actors,' he said, 'are those agents, official and non-official, who are in close and constant personal touch with the Arab and Syrian leaders of all parties. The history of the Orient is made by individuals and small groups, who with or without the consent of their

<sup>1</sup> *U.S. For. Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, V, p. 11.

governments, succeed in bringing to pass events, circumstances and situations, with which the statesmen of Europe have to deal and frequently disentangle.<sup>1</sup>

The Sykes-Picot Agreement had somehow to be abandoned. The convention of September 30 provided for a declaration to be issued by England and France to make clear that they had no desire to annex the territory of the Arab state. This declaration was issued on November 8, 1918. It spoke of the intention of the Allies 'to encourage and assist in the establishment of indigenous Governments and Administrations in Syria and Mesopotamia,' it disclaimed any wish 'to impose any particular institution on these lands,' and proclaimed that the Allies had 'no other care' but to give support to the governments which these areas 'shall have adopted of their own free will'. The convention of September 30, which stipulated that this Declaration should be made, also stipulated that it would conform to the Sykes-Picot Agreement.<sup>2</sup> 'It was evident,' Sir Arnold Wilson rightly remarks, 'that nothing in the verbal form of the Declaration was inconsistent with a strict adherence by the Allies to the terms of the Agreement, but the fact that it was considered necessary to make such an announcement, and that it should have been published simultaneously in New York and Cairo, as well as London and Paris, was regarded as proof positive that it was intended to supplement if not to supersede previous announcements.'<sup>3</sup> This precisely was the significance that Lloyd George attempted to attribute to the Declaration. At the meeting of the Council of Four on March 20, 1919, he declared that 'this announcement which was the latest expression of policy by the two Governments [France and Great Britain], was more important than all the old agreements.' But this was what the French would not admit. They had agreed to be a party to the Declaration precisely because they thought that it did not commit them to the abandonment of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and it was basing himself on this agreement that Pichon, the French Foreign Minister, asserted, at this meeting the claims of France. 'France,' he said, 'could not abandon her rights.'<sup>4</sup> In such a situation the Declaration could do nothing but mischief. Instead of betokening an agreement between the two principal interested parties, it created one more cause of dissension, and the ambiguity of its rhetoric increased the confusion of the East.

The French case was simple. In the middle of the War they had nego-

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of November 9, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Gontaut-Biron, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> A. T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia, 1917-1920*, 1931, p. 103.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. For. Rel., *Paris Peace Conf.*, V, pp. 3-4.



tiated an agreement, and now they wanted to see it carried out. They were prepared to consider changes in the distribution of territory: in December 1918, Clemenceau consented to cede to England, Mosul, which had been in the French sphere, and Palestine, which had been set aside to be internationally administered.<sup>1</sup> But they were not prepared to put in question the principles underlying the Sykes-Picot Agreement. These were to the effect that the Ottoman territories in Asia were to be annexed or otherwise controlled by the interested Great Powers, and that an equitable division between these Powers was the only satisfactory solution of the Eastern Question. In particular, they could not agree that a state set up in this area would escape the direct or indirect control and influence of a Great Power. So that when Faisal claimed an independent Syria and self-determination for all the Arab Provinces, the French understood this language to mean that they were being covertly deprived of their rights to the benefit of England. They could not believe that there existed a native class able, unaided, to exercise power, to administer a territory and to defend its sovereignty. As they saw the situation, the alternative to French influence in Syria was, not Syrian independence, but English influence. And in such an outcome they saw no reason to acquiesce. '... If the British would give up Mesopotamia,' Yale reports de Caix, an official of the French Foreign Ministry as saying, 'France would be only too glad to give up Syria, and thus leave intact the Turkish Empire.'<sup>2</sup> If therefore, the British were dealing with Mesopotamia as they saw fit, then, the French claimed the same latitude in Syria. They had agreed to set up an Arab state there, and they were ready to abide by their promise; but they had also stipulated that they would have the right to supply advisers to this state. 'Now, by an "adviser" these documents [the Sykes-Picot Agreement] undoubtedly mean—though they do not say so—an adviser whose advice must be followed.'<sup>3</sup> This point made by Balfour was the one on which Clemenceau always insisted. Faisal, Clemenceau claimed, had to deal with France alone and should not be encouraged to invoke the intercession of England on his behalf. 'It is for France to reach a direct understanding with Faisal. But how can an understanding with him be possible,' Clemenceau asked Derby, the British Ambassador in Paris, in October 1919, 'if the Emir, who claims sovereignty over the whole of Syria, remains protected by England?'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, Series I, vol. IV (hereafter referred to as *Documents I: IV*), p. 251.

<sup>2</sup> Y.P.II., Interview with de Caix, September 13, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 344.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468. Clemenceau to Derby, October 14, 1919.

For the French then there was simply one question at issue: whether Faisal would recognise that the state in which he had been installed fell within a French sphere of influence. They endeavoured to persuade him of this point, and that he could not count on English support in his refusal to be persuaded. Eventually, the difference between them had to be settled by force.

The circumstances of England precluded a like simplicity. The conception lying behind the Sykes-Picot Agreement had been a development of the traditional English policy towards the Ottoman Empire. Now, suddenly, at the end of the War, this conception seemed no longer satisfactory. One powerful inducement to reconsider the Agreement lay, without doubt, in the collapse of Russia and the consequent abandonment of its claims over the Ottoman Empire. For both England and Russia, France was a necessary third party in the Near East, an element imparting stability to an otherwise precarious balance. With Russia absent from the scene, the usefulness of France in the Near East could be questioned, and her long history of rivalry with England would again loom large in the calculations of English statesmen. In 1902, Saunders, the correspondent of *The Times* in Berlin, expressing his suspicion of German policy, and advocating an alliance with France, wrote: 'France is a country and a nation whose ideas, whose ambitions, whose ideals we can understand and know the limits of.'<sup>1</sup> The sentence may stand as a concise justification of the policy of the *Entente Cordiale*. But what cemented the *Entente* had been apprehension of extensive German ambitions, and Germany now was defeated and powerless. The ambitions of France therefore, however limited, acquired a new importance. But France after all was an ally in Europe; and it was European combinations and European quarrels that largely decided the fate of Eastern possessions and spheres of influence. The question that faced English statesmen was, whether by checking France in the Middle East, they would not forfeit its support in Europe, and whether they could replace the support of France by that of an equivalent Power. This crucial question was never faced decisively and clearly;<sup>2</sup> events, instead, were allowed to dictate an answer, and when the events compelled England

<sup>1</sup> *History of The Times*, III, 1947, p. 366.

<sup>2</sup> See Hardinge of Penshurst, *Old Diplomacy*, 1947, p. 260, for an instance of this indecision on the part of Lloyd George and Curzon: 'During the week [in August 1920] that Lloyd George and Curzon spent in Paris I was struck by the frequency with which they used the phrase "rupture with the French." The idea seemed to be perfectly familiar to them and to present no drawback from our point of view. I asked Lloyd George at dinner one night, and Curzon afterwards, what they considered a rupture with the French would imply. Both answered that they did not know.'

to choose between France and Faisal, it was France naturally that England chose. The decision was belated and half-hearted, and in the meantime false hopes had been raised and scope given to violent agitations.

The confusion was still more serious. When England, France and Russia decided in 1915 to partition the Ottoman Empire, 'they never supposed themselves,' Balfour explained in his masterly memorandum on the Sykes-Picot Agreement, 'to be dealing with three nations [in Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia] already in existence, ready for "provisional recognition," only requiring the removal of the Turk, the advice of a mandatory and a little time to enable them "to stand alone." It never occurred to them that they had to deal at all with nations in the modern and Western sense of the term. With the Arab race, Arab culture, and Arab social and religious organisation (to say nothing of Jews, Maronites, Druses and Kurds) they knew they had to deal. But this is a very different thing.'<sup>1</sup> But now, in 1919, there was no lack of men in positions of influence and authority who did maintain that there were, in the East, 'nations in the modern and Western sense of the term.' Such were the sentiments, if not the actual principles animating the United States Delegation in Paris. They were also in vogue on the British side. 'As regards the future settlement,' Sir Eyre Crowe wrote to the head of the Eastern Department in the Foreign Office, 'I believe and hope that we are really in agreement as to the principles of that settlement. . . . These principles must, of course, be those of nationality, not religion.' 'I want to see,' he also said, 'the question settled on the basis and merits of nationality—Kurd, Arab, Armenian, Greek and Turk.'<sup>2</sup> Among most of those particularly concerned with the Middle East such views were considered orthodox. Lawrence, for instance, immediately after his return from Damascus, in November 1918, wrote a paper for the information of the Cabinet. Faisal, according to him, required 'to be sovereign in his own dominions, with complete liberty to choose any foreign advisers he wants of any nationality he pleases. These advisers will be part of the Arab Government and will draw their executive authority from it and not from their own Government.' Faisal, Lawrence affirmed, 'is clear-sighted and well-educated, and is capable of satisfying the needs of Syria in local self-government.'<sup>3</sup> Less than a year later he informed Yale, who was visiting London, that 'he had plainly told Lloyd George that the British Government would have to allow the

<sup>1</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 912-13. Crowe to Kidson, December 1, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, p. 268.

Arabs to organise an Arab Government in Mesopotamia.' The British had to 'live up to their promises and establish an Arab Government there.'<sup>1</sup> Major Young, who had served with Lawrence during Allenby's Syrian campaign, and who then joined the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office in January 1919, was another exponent of independence and unity. 'A fortnight after joining the Foreign Office,' he writes in his memoirs, 'I wrote a memorandum expressing my own views on the policy which should be adopted at the Peace Conference, in the light of my experience during the War. In this paper I emphasized the essential unity of the Arab problem, and deplored the division of the Middle East between two mandatory Powers. I also gave it as my opinion that any indigenous Arab Government should have a titular head, and that no foreigner, however impartial, could fill the same place in the minds of the people as a representative of their own race.'<sup>2</sup>

These two ideas, then, were present in the minds of the English negotiators in 1919: that the French had dangerous and perhaps unfair pretensions in the Levant, and that Arab nationalism, represented by Faisal and his followers, made legitimate demands that ought to be satisfied. Lloyd George came to regard the Sykes-Picot Agreement an obstacle 'causing all the trouble with the French.'<sup>3</sup> 'George declares the French are making trouble for themselves,' Colonel House wrote in his diary in March 1919, 'and war is sure to come if they insist upon their present plans.'<sup>4</sup> It appears that Lloyd George thought French intransigence not only disagreeable, but likely to lead to Sharifian resistance. This, his advisers in the Middle East were always telling him, would be highly dangerous, not only to the French but to the British army itself. 'If the French were given a mandate in Syria,' Allenby told the Council of Four at their meeting of March 20, 1919, 'there would be serious trouble, and probably war. If Faisal undertook the direction of the operations, there might be a huge war covering the whole area, and the Arabs of the Hedjaz would join. This would necessitate the employment of a large force. This would probably involve Great Britain also if they were in Palestine. It might even involve them in Egypt and the consequences,' he

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285. In his paper of the previous November, Lawrence had contented himself with urging sovereign Arab government in Syria only, stating that in Iraq 'the Arabs expect the British to keep control' and that only 'a nominal Arab administration' was hoped for. Yale visited London in September-October 1919. The opinions of some of those he saw are quoted and summarised in Lawrence's *Letters*, pp. 284-6.

<sup>2</sup> Young, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Riddell, *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After*, 1933, p. 25. Riddell wrote down Lloyd George's remark in February 1919.

<sup>4</sup> *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, IV, p. 371.

warned, 'would be incalculable.'<sup>1</sup> Allenby continued in his fear of Faisal. On May 30, 1919, he transmitted a threat made by Faisal that he would consider himself 'irresponsible for what may occur if the French force is increased even by one soldier'. The English Political Officer in Damascus considered that Faisal was 'in deadly earnest,' and feared 'bloodshed on a large scale'. Allenby therefore proceeded to enumerate the catastrophes he anticipated if Faisal raised the standard of revolt: 'This will jeopardise position of my troops in Syria and will seriously endanger the whole situation in Syria and Palestine. A word from Faisal will bring against us all the warlike Bedouins from the east of Jordan, on whose friendly attitude depends the safety of Palestine and the security of my long lines of communication.

'A rising of the Bedouins would bring against us also the tribes of the Sinai Peninsula and serious trouble would certainly break out in Egypt and the Sudan. In such a case I shall be totally unable to handle the situation with the troops at my disposal.'<sup>2</sup> Allenby's Chief Political Officer sounded the same premonitory note. 'Faisal,' Clayton telegraphed to Curzon, 'will undoubtedly take hostile action,' if the fate of Syria were decided without his knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Allenby remained convinced and apprehensive of Faisal's offensive power. In September 1919, he warned that if French troops replaced British in Syria, Faisal would attack the French;<sup>4</sup> and in October, he was telling Yale that not only would there be a conflict between the French and the Arabs, but that such a conflict would cause the British difficulties in Palestine and Mesopotamia.<sup>5</sup>

Lloyd George came to Paris persuaded that it was necessary, both in the interest of England and of peace in the East, and in justice to Arab nationalism, to check French ambitions in the Levant. But in December 1918, Clemenceau had conceded to him Mosul and Palestine. He had to make it clear therefore, if his object were to be fulfilled, that his opposition to French policy in Syria did not stem from a desire to supplant France in this area. At the meeting of the Council of Four on March 20, 1919, Lloyd George took the opportunity 'to say at once that just as we had disinterested ourselves in 1912, so we now disinterested ourselves in 1919. If the Conference asked us to take Syria we should reply in the

<sup>1</sup> U.S. *For Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, V, pp. 11-12. Allenby had ended the War with more than three hundred thousand troops under his command in the Levant; see M. Larcher, *La Guerre Turque dans la Guerre Mondiale*, Paris, 1926, p. 296.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents I: IV*, pp. 256-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263, Clayton to Curzon, June 1, 1919.

<sup>4</sup> D. H. Miller, *My Diary at the Conference of Paris*, XX, 1926, p. 418.

<sup>5</sup> Y.P.II., Yale's interview with Allenby of October 11, 1919.

negative.<sup>1</sup> He himself adhered to this position during all subsequent negotiations.

But if England disinterested itself in Syria, it did not follow that England approved French policy, or considered that the dispute could be settled according to the principles of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. On the contrary, the question was to be thrown open to discussion anew. And this time, the discussion would not be confined to England and France; others could be expected to lend support to the English thesis. In November 1918, before the peace negotiations began, Faisal was brought to France in an English battleship in order to plead his cause before the assembled nations. The French were not informed beforehand, and they took Faisal's move amiss, telling him that they did not consider he had any standing to represent Syria.<sup>2</sup> A voice more powerful than Faisal's could also be reasonably expected to suggest principles other than those of the Sykes-Picot Agreement for the settlement of the Eastern Question. President Wilson was opposed to secret treaties and he favoured self-determination. Lloyd George hoped to gain his support. When the Syrian question was discussed in the Council of Four on March 20, 1919, Wilson, confronted with the Anglo-French recriminations, proposed an entirely new method to solve the problem. The proposal was simplicity itself. Here were conflicting claims and assertions; let therefore a company of experts appointed by England, France and the United States, travel to the spot and ascertain the wishes of the people. By comparison, every other proposal for dealing with Syria now appeared tyrannical and in bad faith.<sup>3</sup> Opposition was, in the circumstances, ill-advised. Clemenceau therefore accepted Wilson's suggestion and tried to make the best of an unfavourable situation. He pointed out how difficult it was to elicit truth from Oriental minds, how delicate such an enquiry would be, and that, in any case, there were historical claims to be taken into account, besides 'the principles propounded by President Wilson'; and, finally, since an

<sup>1</sup> *U.S. For. Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, V, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Amin Sa'id, II, part I, p. 14 ff.; Brémond, p. 310. Faisal was subsequently admitted to the Conference as a representative of his father the King of the Hijaz; see Lawrence's *Letters*, pp. 273-4.

<sup>3</sup> The proposal to send a commission to Syria was being mooted some time before by Doctor Howard Bliss, President of the Syrian Protestant College (the American University) of Beirut. He was anti-French, and a self-determination man. For his views see *U.S. For. Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, III, pp. 1016-21, and XI, p. 76; also F. Manuel, *The Realities of American Palestine Relations*, Washington, 1949, p. 223; also *The Home Letters of T. E. Lawrence and his Brothers*, p. 352, Lawrence's letter of January 30, 1919: 'Bliss of the Beyrout College is here, and proving a very valuable assistant of the Arab cause.'

enquiry there had to be, let it not be confined to Syria, let it embrace the other territories of Turkey-in-Asia, in which other Powers were interested. It was as difficult for Lloyd George to resist this extension of Wilson's proposal as it was for Clemenceau to resist Wilson's proposal itself; so, while obviously agreeing with Wilson that an enquiry was necessary in Syria, he affirmed that 'he had no objection to an enquiry into Palestine and Mesopotamia, which were the regions in which the British Empire were principally concerned.'<sup>1</sup> Only Balfour pointed out that a commission of enquiry might seriously delay the peace settlement. And indeed this was recognised at a meeting of English and French experts on the Middle East held a few days later in Paris. At this meeting, where Lawrence and Gertrude Bell, among others, were present, there was 'general recognition by all present that the effect of sending an international commission to Syria would be to unsettle the country, to make it appear that the Conference had been unable to reach any decisions and to open the door to intrigues and manifestations of all kinds.' Lawrence himself stated that 'the proposal to send a commission to Syria had been prompted by the failure of the French authorities to approach the Emir Faisal in a conciliatory way.'<sup>2</sup>

Lloyd George continued to press for the dispatch of the international commission to Syria. At the meeting of the Council of Four of April 22, 1919, he said, 'he thought the Commission should soon start. It was settled so far as he was concerned.'<sup>3</sup> A month later, the Commission had still not started. President Wilson became impatient: 'The delegates whom he had nominated', he declared at a meeting of the Council of May 21, 1919, 'were men of such standing that he could not keep them waiting any longer in Paris, consequently he had instructed them to leave for Syria on Monday and to await there their colleagues on the Commission.' Lloyd George supported him and said he would give the British delegates the same instruction.<sup>4</sup> On the following day, Lloyd George affirmed that 'he was quite willing to abide by the decision of the inhabitants as interpreted by the Commission.'<sup>5</sup> But Clemenceau was recalcitrant. A Commission would reopen a question which he claimed had already been settled between England and France. He would consent to an enquiry only if he could obtain a balancing advantage: he would appoint no delegates to the Commission unless Syria were garrisoned by French instead

<sup>1</sup> *U.S. For. Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, V, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Y.P.I., Memorandum on Syria, March 26, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> *U.S. For. Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, V, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 760.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 811.

of British troops. Lloyd George expostulated and remonstrated and accused him of not carrying out what he called 'the bargain'; Clemenceau would not budge from his resolve; 'he was ready for the French representatives to go, as soon as the British troops in Syria had been replaced by the French'.<sup>1</sup> But Lloyd George would not concede this for two reasons; there was, in the first place, a disagreement between the French and the British on the boundary of the Mosul area which Clemenceau had ceded in 1918; and, in the second, Lloyd George tried to make Clemenceau abandon the Sykes-Picot Agreement as a basis of negotiations. 'He thought it was agreed,' his colleagues on the Council of Four were told, 'that the Sykes-Picot Agreement had been a bad one. He wanted to know whether it existed or not. If it exists, France has no right to hoist a flag or to put a soldier in the Arab zone; they had only the right to provide advisers. The Sykes-Picot Agreement was based on an understanding that the Turks were to be overthrown in which case there was to be a certain division of responsibility. It was, however,' he continued, here introducing a novel principle into the discussion, 'based on the supposition of a joint effort. It was never supposed that one Power was to do the whole thing. . . . Great Britain had incurred white casualties of some 125,000 in the Turkish campaign. . . . If the Sykes-Picot Agreement was to be claimed in the letter he would say, first, that the portion now in dispute was Arab and not French under that Agreement, and, secondly, that it ought to have been claimed when it involved some effort.' The Sykes-Picot Agreement amounted to very little, and it was a bad agreement, moreover the French had done nothing to deserve the share allotted to them, and the Commission was now the only way out. So, when Sir Henry Wilson, who was present at the meeting, said that Allenby opposed the sending of French troops to Syria, as 'this would give trouble if it was done before an agreement was reached,' and asked whether these troops would continue to be excluded from Syria, Lloyd George replied that 'General Allenby was in command and was responsible for order and must have a free hand until a settlement had been reached'. But presumably to avoid an open breach with the French, Lloyd George had announced that if the French sent no delegates to the Commission of enquiry, he himself would send none.<sup>2</sup> The deadlock between France and England was complete and the American delegates, therefore, went to Syria on their own.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *U.S. For. Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, V, pp. 763 and 766.

<sup>2</sup> *U.S. For. Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, V, pp. 808-12. Meeting of the Council of Four of May 22, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> They constituted the so-called King-Crane Commission. Wilson's choice of his



The Sykes-Picot scheme was dead. Its doom was announced in the declarations made to Husain and the Seven Syrians in the last months of the War; it was irreparably damaged by the events which took place at the capture of Damascus; and its fate was sealed by Lloyd George's policy at the Peace Conference in the first half of 1919. There was nothing to replace it. The disagreement between France and England was complete, and neither would give way to the other. But England and France could wait, and would eventually bridge, in some fashion, the difference which separated them; for both, the matter was of secondary importance. It incommoded nobody directly, either in England or in France. But the unpleasant consequences of their quarrels were to be visited on the luckless countries of the Near East. These were under military occupation and ravaged by four years of scarcity and war. Whatever orderly government they had enjoyed was destroyed with the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. They were now to be made the sport of antagonistic ambitions and unscrupulous agitations, and political and sectarian passions were to be awakened and continually sustained among their restless populations.

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delegates deserves recording: 'Mr. White stated that he had been informed that the President wished to send Mr. Richard Crane and Mr. King, the President of Oberlin College, as field observers to Syria. The President felt that these two men were particularly qualified to go to Syria because they knew nothing about it.' *Minutes of the Daily Meeting of the Commissioners Plenipotentiary*, March 27, 1919, *U.S. For. Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, XI, p. 133. On the King-Crane Commission in general see Manuel, chapter VI *passim* and S. G. Haim, "'The Arab Awakening': A Source for the Historian?", in *Die Welt des Islams*, Leiden, vol. II, no. 4, 1953, pp. 237-50.

## CHAPTER 6

### Syria, 1918-1920

#### I

WHEN Faisal came to France in November 1918, his policy seemed to consist in seeking the support of England in order to resist the claims of France.<sup>1</sup> This policy was at the time outlined by Lawrence in his paper on *The Reconstruction of Arabia* which he submitted to the Cabinet.<sup>2</sup> By agreeing to, or at least, not opposing the English views on Palestine and Mesopotamia, he hoped to secure English support for his main effort against France. This policy was inevitable, for he could secure the support of no other Power; but it seemed also to stand a chance of success: for, it was English might and influence which had until now sustained Faisal. So, with valiant hope, he came to the Peace Conference and staked his claim.<sup>3</sup>

A subsidiary tactic adopted by Faisal was the attempt to introduce the United States into the debate. He called on America to make the Powers follow President Wilson's principles. According to these principles, as understood by Faisal, the Syrians could determine the mandatory who would prepare them for independence. He informed Colonel House, in a conversation of March 29, 1919, that 'he had been sent up by his people to see the various European nations and select the one that they liked best for a mandatory. He liked the English very well. Since then he had come to know the Americans. He wished to know whether the United States would undertake the idea of accepting a mandate in Syria. . . .'<sup>4</sup> America, it seemed, was 'the most disinterested Power', as he informed Yale in a conversation of February 13, 1919. He really preferred the United States, but 'he did not dare to say so openly as he received no encouragement from America.'<sup>5</sup> He held the same language to the King-Crane Commission, when they visited Damascus in July 1919: 'They [the Syrians] desired', he said, 'to ask for America first, Great Britain second, definitely refusing blandishment of France.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, pp. 265-9.

<sup>2</sup> The text of his speech before the Conference is printed in *U.S. For. Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, III, pp. 889-94.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence's *Letters*, p. 275.

<sup>4</sup> Y.P.II.

<sup>5</sup> *Documents*, I: IV, p. 312.

When President Wilson suggested an international commission to investigate the Syrian question, Faisal thought that his policy was successful: the English were quarrelling with the French, and President Wilson wished to discover the desires of the Syrians. The commission, Faisal told Colonel House, 'was the best thing he had ever heard of in his life'.<sup>1</sup> Before his departure to Syria in April 1919, he addressed a letter to Clemenceau in which he left the door open for further negotiations. Clemenceau had spoken of 'the secular rôle played by France in Syria', and of the prospect of making 'more detailed arrangements to ensure the collaboration of France with Syria.' In the discussions which had preceded this exchange of letters, Faisal, as he later informed Clayton, 'agreed verbally with Clemenceau to use his efforts with the people to secure a French mandate of Syria on the understanding that France recognised Syrian independence.'<sup>2</sup> But in his letter to Clemenceau, Faisal only referred to the 'deep sympathy that exists between the people of France and the people of Syria', and to 'the need there is for us to come to a complete understanding on the points that interest us'. He made, however, a point of thanking Clemenceau 'for having been the first to suggest the dispatch of the Inter-allied Commission which is to leave shortly for the East to ascertain the wishes of the local peoples as to the future organisation of their country.'<sup>3</sup>

Faisal came back to Syria under the impression that the International Commission would decide the fate of the country. Allenby and the English Political Officers under him also believed this to be the case. When Faisal heard that Clemenceau was making difficulties about the Commission, and was demanding the prior garrisoning of Syria by French troops, he threatened Allenby that he would consider himself 'irresponsible if the French force is increased even by one soldier', and if the Commission did not come out. Allenby transmitted Faisal's telegram and requested authority to inform Faisal that 'the Commission is coming out and will decide the future of the country'.<sup>4</sup> Balfour had to correct Allenby, and to inform him that the Commission had no power to decide, the matter resting with the Principal Allied Powers.<sup>5</sup> Whereupon Clayton, Allenby's Chief Political Officer, informed Curzon that 'if any idea gets abroad that the Commission is not an authoritative one whose recommendations will be considered seriously by the Peace Conference . . . ,

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence's *Letters*, p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 265, n. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents I: IV*, pp. 252-3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256. Allenby to Balfour, May 30, 1919.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259. Balfour to Allenby, May 31, 1919.

there is little doubt that a grave situation will arise.<sup>1</sup> Faisal persisted in his view that if the Commission advised that Great Britain should take the mandate for Syria, Great Britain would take it. After Balfour had corrected Allenby as to the powers of the Commission, Allenby informed Faisal, that 'His Majesty's Government have expressed unwillingness to accept a mandate for Syria but will give fullest weight to advice of Commission.'<sup>2</sup> Faisal tried to take this as meaning that if there was a unanimous demand in Syria for a British mandate, England, in spite of its ostensible unwillingness, would accept it. 'I have noted', he answered, 'Great Britain's expression of unwillingness to take mandate for Syria. Its intention to give the fullest weight to advice of Peace Commission however is cheerfully understood by us all. The Syrians will be unanimous in expressing to Commission their wish to have Britain and no other. . . .'<sup>3</sup> Balfour had to ask Allenby to correct Faisal and to inform him categorically that England would not, in any circumstances, take up a mandate for Syria. Balfour remarked: 'It is evident that he [Faisal] is unwilling to accept the most direct statement as conclusive. . . .'<sup>4</sup> Balfour's language was indeed conclusive and unambiguous. Not so, however, was the language held by the subordinate political officers in the Levant; ' . . . if I am rightly informed,' wrote Balfour in his paper on the Sykes-Picot Agreement, 'the British officers in Syria have not always played up to the British ministers in Paris. This is vehemently and sincerely denied by General Clayton. But friends of mine in Syria confirm the view, and I know personally of one case in which a British officer, though well acquainted with the Prime Minister's pledge, thought himself precluded by his instructions from giving an Arab deputation, which came to ask for British protection, the clear and decisive answer which, by destroying all hopes, would have effectually removed all misunderstandings.'<sup>5</sup> Previously, when the French were complaining of the activities of British officers in Syria, Balfour wrote to Curzon: 'I should mention, . . . that I had learnt in conversation with a British officer who passed through Paris

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273. Clayton to Curzon, June 8, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 276. Allenby to Curzon, June 12, 1919. Balfour had not said to Allenby that the British Government would give 'fullest weight' to the advice of the King-Crane Commission, but merely that the Commission's report would be tendered to the Allies 'who will take their final decision.'

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277. Clayton to Curzon, June 15, 1919.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298. Balfour to Allenby, June 26, 1919.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342. As late as March 1920, it is interesting to note, Allenby was still recurring to the possibility of forming a Sharifian State in Syria and Palestine under English control; Allenby's telegram to Foreign Office, March 20, 1920, in *Sir Arnold Wilson's Correspondence* at the British Museum.

on his way from Syria that it is quite recently that our local officials have been informed of the Prime Minister's categorical statement that "His Majesty's Government are determined not to take a mandate for Syria."<sup>1</sup> Such a state of affairs no doubt contributed to Faisal's eagerness to read the communications he received from Allenby and Clayton in the hopeful light of his own wishes.

But Faisal did not leave things to chance. In the territory that he controlled he set about to arrange matters in such a way that the Commission he was expecting would be confronted with a unanimous expression of the general will. He had no intention, he told Clayton, to keep the promise made to Clemenceau in April to use his influence with his supporters in favour of the French mandate.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, he began to incite them to demonstrations and declarations in favour of absolute Syrian independence. This was the burden of a report by Cornwallis, the Deputy Chief Political Officer, whose reports, Clayton said, 'may be taken to be accurate, as Lieutenant-Colonel Cornwallis enjoys to an exceptional degree the confidence of Emir Faisal and the Arabs in general.' On the occasion of a visit by Allenby to Damascus, the demonstrations consisting of 'organised bands of school children and patriots . . . demanding independence' were, Cornwallis said, 'arranged by the police, no doubt under the orders of the Emir.' 'Faisal,' Cornwallis said further, 'has taken the whole of the political campaign into his own hands, and has already sent instructions to all parts of the country. These instructions will be communicated to the people by government officials, who, no doubt, will be used for political purposes much more openly than before. The people have been told to ask for complete independence for Syria, and at the same time, to express a hope that it will be granted to other Arab countries.' At a big meeting in Damascus, on May 9, 1919, Faisal received full powers from delegations of Syrian notables and religious dignitaries whom he had had brought to Damascus.<sup>3</sup> Faisal was ready for the King-Crane Commission when it reached Syria. 'A great active system of propaganda', Lybyer, an expert with the Commission, wrote, 'has been carried on for the programme [of unity and independence for Syria under Faisal]. . . . This programme has been shaping under our eyes, and to a certain extent has been influenced by a desire to meet the supposed inclinations of the Commission. . . . Agents of Emir Feisal, and . . . the Arab occupying government, have been working very hard for it. Differences

<sup>1</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 232. Balfour to Curzon, July 28, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265, n. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents I: IV*, pp. 263-72. Clayton to Curzon, June 5, 1919.

of opinion have been skilfully accommodated, certain formulas have been distributed in manuscript and print and taught orally. The Press has been influenced in various ways. The immense personal popularity of the Emir has first been enhanced by propaganda, and then used to push the rest of the program.<sup>1</sup> All these activities, it must be noted, went on in a territory under military occupation. In such a territory, as Allenby always liked to point out, political activities were not permitted. And indeed they were not, when Allenby took direct cognizance of them. 'At a meeting between himself and the Commander-in-Chief in the middle of May,' Clayton wrote in a report of June 1919, 'he [Faisal] outlined the situation in France at the time of his departure; and, even at that time, so little was he affected by any discussions which may have taken place between himself and Clemenceau that he put forward a proposition to assemble selected Syrian representatives with a view to bringing about a *coup d'état* by the immediate declaration of the complete independence of Syria. The Commander-in-Chief forbade any such action, and the idea was therefore dropped.'<sup>2</sup> But not altogether, for Faisal proceeded, in spite of Allenby's prohibition, to assemble a Congress at Damascus. 'In the Eastern zone,' writes Amin Sa'id, 'the elections took place according to the old Ottoman law . . . but on the coast [the Lebanon] and in Palestine, which were under foreign occupation, the notables and the leaders of opinion met and elected representatives. . . . In this manner deputies from Beirut, Tripoli, Ladhikiya, and Palestine came to Damascus and joined the Congress. On June 7, the Congress was officially opened. . . .'<sup>3</sup> The Congress was formed of the nationalists who had been put in power in October 1918 and who controlled the administration. Elections, in any meaningful sense of the term, there were, of course, none. An idea of the character of this assembly is gained from the fact that the delegates who claimed to represent Lebanon, where the Christian element predominated, were 13 Sunni Muslims, 1 Shi'a Muslim and 2 Maronites.<sup>4</sup> In March 1920, this Congress, still sitting in Damascus, proclaimed Syrian independence and refused to recognise a mandate exercised by any Power. Whereupon Curzon protested that this body had no standing at all, but Faisal rightly replied: 'The Syrian Congress, which met on the 7th of this month [March 1920] is the same congress which had previously held numerous meetings with the full knowledge of the British authority which was then in command of Syria.

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 286. Clayton to Curzon, June 23, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> Amin Sa'id, vol. II, part I, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> P. David, *Un Gouvernement Arabe a Damas. Le Congrès Syrien*, Paris, 1923, p. 56.

'The Congress met to give its views to the American Commission . . . it then held meetings for three months . . . and at the end of last year, another meeting was held, which discussed various internal questions, and no protest was received either from the British or the French authorities.'<sup>1</sup> But perhaps things came to pass in the manner which Cornwallis described to Gontaut-Biron: 'In the Eastern zone, which ought to have been under purely military occupation,' Cornwallis is reported to have said, 'the creation of a *de facto* Arab Government has been tolerated. It is too late now to take any counter-action. Whatever the consequences, so long as a firm decision about the occupied territories is not taken in Europe, we have to let them be.'<sup>2</sup>

The King-Crane Commission manifested itself and went away. The report of the two commissioners was as ill-informed as its influence on policy was negligible. But their enquiry was the occasion of turbulence and unsettlement. It raised false hopes, and gave rise to intrigue and intimidation. It exacerbated political passions and thereby made a peaceful settlement immeasurably more difficult. Visiting Syria a few months later, in October, and witnessing the effects of the Commission's visit, Miss Bell was moved to call it a criminal deception.<sup>3</sup> Faisal had, in a way, built his policy on the King-Crane Commission. But nobody, not even the United States, took any notice of its report. House had told Faisal when he saw him in March in Paris that 'he was very doubtful whether the United States would accept the mandate.'<sup>4</sup> But Faisal went on hoping that President Wilson would come to his aid, and did not give up this hope until the President went back to the United States towards the end of 1919.<sup>5</sup>

If the hope of American support was false, there still remained the more substantial prospect of English help. But if the British were to decide that they would not quarrel with France for his sake, Faisal's plans in Syria would be destroyed. He had, it is true, partisans among the English, both in the Middle East and in England, and the goodwill they created for him was abundant. But if their advocacy should prove in the end ineffective, and if he should come to lose the goodwill he counted upon, his position would be very precarious. For beyond attempting to embroil England with France, Faisal had no other strategy. 'His great difficulty now,' reported the political officer in Aleppo in June 1919, 'is what he considers the extraordinary attitude of Britain; after liberating the Arab-speaking countries at an immense cost in blood and treasure, and after four years'

<sup>1</sup> Sati' al-Husri, p. 270.

<sup>2</sup> Gontaut-Biron, p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> In her memorandum on *Syria in October 1919*.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence's *Letters*, p. 275.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Askari, vol. II, p. 16.

unbroken friendship with the Emir and the Arabs, England has suddenly cooled, refuses to say whether she is going to help any more, and is now giving the impression that she has sold the Arabs to suit the exigencies of politics in Europe. As for Syria,' the political officer reported Faisal to affirm, 'England did not conquer Syria—she defeated the Turkish forces in Syria, and thereby liberated the country, and Syria is no more a chattel to be used for political bargaining than is liberated Belgium. All the more is the Emir surprised at our attitude because of the obvious importance to England of the firm friendship of the Moslem Arabs. . . . Besides, these Arab countries command all the roads leading to the East, and every consideration demands that England should not surrender this enormous advantage, political, commercial and religious to even her closest ally. . . . With these countries in anyone else's hands England becomes the humble suitor of that country. France, to all appearances, relies solely on England and America for her future existence; this the Emir knows full well, and he cannot understand why England should be so afraid of doing anything to offend the country which should logically be prepared to make almost any sacrifice to avoid alienating England.'<sup>1</sup> When the English ministers refused to follow Faisal in this train of thought, he had nothing else on which to fall back. He could use threats and bluster as he had indeed done before: 'My political officer at Damascus,' wrote Meinertzhagen who succeeded Clayton as Chief Political Officer, 'reports volunteers are being voluntarily enrolled and swearing to defend the country against partition without special reference to any Power. Feisal gives assurance that there will be no trouble at present. Feisal intends the movement to strengthen his case before His Majesty's Government.'<sup>2</sup> He could try to commit his interlocutors, by devious but feeble means, to courses which they had no intention of following, as when he thanked Clemenceau for sponsoring the International Commission of Enquiry, or when he assured Curzon that he rested 'content with your Lordship's avowal to me that my cause is just, and that the ministry of His Majesty feel and appreciate the same.' Curzon had made no such avowal, and sharply minuted Faisal's letter: 'I must place on record that I did not state that Feisal's cause was just and that His Majesty's Government felt and appreciated the same.'<sup>3</sup> Sharifian diplomacy was quite inept. When Faisal came for the second time to Europe in September 1919, he produced a claim, with which he confronted Lloyd George, of a treaty, which he said had been concluded

<sup>1</sup> *Documents I: IV*, pp. 290-1. Clayton to Curzon, June 23, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370. Meinertzhagen to Curzon, September 3, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476.



between his father and Great Britain, 'and His Majesty had never shown it to anyone. He had always said that if there were any difference of opinion in regard to it, he would settle it with Great Britain.'<sup>1</sup> This treaty was apparently distinct from McMahon's pledge to Husain. It 'gave as boundaries for the Arab Provinces the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, and did not exclude any province at all right up to the Taurus mountains. As regards the West Coast, it included everything.'<sup>2</sup> Faisal, however, could not produce the text of the treaty as 'His Majesty has never shown it to anyone'; both Lloyd George and Curzon professed complete ignorance of such a document, and repeated enquiries to Husain at Mecca failed to produce it. What Husain sent his son, and what Faisal submitted to the British Government as the text of a treaty was found upon scrutiny to be 'almost identical with an enclosure sent in a letter from King Husain to the High Commissioner in August 1918, which was King Husain's own version of various agreements concluded between himself and His Majesty's Government,'<sup>3</sup> and to which no reply had ever been made.

The position of the Sharifian family, and of Faisal, who had come to be its most prominent member, was very difficult. In 1916, they had revolted against the Ottoman Empire. Now, this empire was defeated, and its territories occupied by the armies of Christian Powers. In the eyes of the Muslims, therefore, the Sharifians would be considered accessories to the destruction of the only Muslim Great Power in the world. From this accusation they had to clear themselves. And they could only clear themselves by being intransigent towards the Allies, that is to say, towards the Powers by whose help they had arrived to their present eminence. This was the reason why Faisal would never keep his word to Clemenceau, and why his only policy, which was to prove so futile, was to try to set England at odds with France, in the hope, thereby, of avoiding a connexion with either of them which might justify the Muslim accusations against him and his house. This preoccupation appears now and again in his efforts to persuade the British to support him against the French. 'By breaking up the Turkish Empire and delivering the Hedjaz, Mesopotamia and Syrian Moslems', the Political Officer at Aleppo reports him as saying in June 1919, 'England has caused alarm among all the Moslems who look to the Sultan as Caliph, and now she is deliberately throwing away the friendship of the very people she has risked so much to save.'<sup>4</sup> The following September, entreating Lloyd George not to leave him to face the French alone, he again let his fears come to light: 'One of the objects of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 414.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 402.

<sup>4</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 291.

the Rising which I have undertaken,' he wrote, 'and of which I have assumed to responsibility, . . . is to persuade the Moslem World of the false principles which the "Committee of Union and Progress" proclaimed, viz.: the necessity for Pan-Islamism and nothing else. Mecca was upheld against Constantinople and the Turks in order to maintain the "national principle" and to prostrate any other. Does not your Excellency therefore see that the placing of the Arab provinces under Mandates of different Powers will be counted by the Moslems as a complete failure of the straightforward and righteous national policy which ought to be supported with all possible power and all firmness, and does your Excellency not know that the losing of hope for unity of the country will lead up to a very strong reaction, which will carry Ruin and Disaster in its steps not only in this Country, but elsewhere, as well, as a result of Despair?' 'I have now reached a stage,' he continued, 'which requires great alacrity of thought, because I am placed between two contradictory situations, either I should have a guarantee, to reassure the people of the unity of their country, which would extricate me from a position of suspicion, touching my honour and my moral status, or I should wash my hands of the whole business and leave the country in anarchy. . . .'<sup>1</sup> In this passage Faisal shows himself a diligent student of current political jargon. At that time it was fashionable to look upon 'pan-Islamism' as nefarious, and upon the 'national principle' as its efficacious antidote. The Arab Revolt had in fact been justified to the Muslims on the score of saving Islam from the atheist Young Turks, but now Faisal was conforming to the preconceptions of his European interlocutors and showing himself a convinced believer in the 'national principle'. The meaning of his language, which is disguised in this fashion, is nonetheless clear. And it became even clearer in the course of a discussion which took place in Downing Street on September 19, 1919. 'He was', he exclaimed, 'a descendant of one of the oldest Arab families which traced its descent to the Prophet. He had taken up arms against the Kaliph on the behalf of the Allies and with full confidence in Great Britain. . . . The aspirations of all the Arabs were for unity. In order to keep his honour, he must be prepared to die for this unity, and not to allow any division to be made. . . . He could not stand before the Moslem world and say that he had been asked to wage a war against the Kaliph of the Moslems and now see the European Powers divide the Arab country.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Documents I: IV*, pp. 386-7. See also his statement of August 31, 1919, *ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 403-4. An indication of the Muslim view of the Arab Revolt is provided by the attitude of Arab Muslim writers towards it. They are all—from King Abdullah

Faisal's fear for his reputation as a Muslim leader comes out well in his dealings with the Zionists. The Palestine question was, in those days, far from having the importance which it has since acquired. It was, in the eyes of all the principal parties, a subsidiary affair.<sup>1</sup> The main dispute was between England, France and Faisal, and all sides considered the Zionist question a secondary matter.

According to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, Palestine was to be administered internationally. Thus England and France could both claim to have a certain say in its fate. This was known to the Sharifians. Hogarth indeed introduced the Zionist question in his interview of January 1918 with Husain 'by reminding King of proviso in original agreements safeguarding special interests of our allies and especially France.'<sup>2</sup> The coming of the Zionists could, therefore, have from the Sharifian point of view, certain advantages. The Balfour declaration conflicted with the Sykes-Picot Agreement and was, for that reason, useful to them. The Zionists constituted one more weapon with which to fight the French in the Levant. Whether Faisal arrived to this conclusion on his own, or at Lawrence's instance, is not clear; but the fact remains that neither he, nor Lawrence, opposed the Zionist policy of England at the time of the Paris Peace Conference. 'In Palestine,' Lawrence wrote in his paper of November 4, 1918, 'the Arabs hope that the British will keep what they have conquered. They will not approve Jewish Independence for Palestine but will support as far as they can Jewish infiltration, if it is behind a British, as opposed to an international facade. If any attempt is made to set up the international control proposed in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, Faisal will press for self-determination in Palestine, and give the moral support of the

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downwards—concerned to prove that the Sharif revolted *after* the design of the Young Turks to break up the unity of Islam had become apparent, and their persecution of the Arabs intolerable; that if there was treason, the Arab leaders were innocent of it; or, alternatively, that, as Sati' al-Husri argues, the destruction of the Ottoman Empire was a foregone conclusion, whether the Arabs revolted or not; see al-Husri, p. 173. The position of the Eastern Christians, such as Antonius, is necessarily different. They are not touched by the charge of having destroyed Islamic unity. Their animus, indeed, against the Ottoman Empire, derived from the fact that this Power preserved Muslim unity and supremacy, and kept the Christians in an inferior position. They are concerned to justify the Arab Revolt as a *national* revolt, aiming at a secular state in which Muslim supremacy was to disappear and the Christians to become the equals of the Muslims. This seems to be the major but unstated premise of their writings.

<sup>1</sup> The circumstances leading to the British Government issuing the Balfour Declaration are hitherto only partially known. What evidence exists has been examined in C. Sykes's *Two Studies in Virtue*, pp. 168-228. See also Frischwasser-Ra'anan, pp. 75-80.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 5964 (1939).

Arab Government to the peasantry of Palestine, to resist expropriation.<sup>1</sup> If the French, that is, were kept out of Palestine—and Syria—Faisal would tolerate the Zionists; otherwise, he would oppose them. This line of reasoning led to the Faisal-Weizmann Agreement of January 1919,<sup>2</sup> a curious document, the efficacy of which rested not on what the two signatories could do, but on how far, a third party, the British Foreign Office, saw fit to exert itself in order to satisfy Faisal's demands. Such being the case, the Agreement, therefore, was useless. Faisal, speaking before the Peace Conference in February 1919, made no claim to Palestine which, 'in consequence of its universal character, he left on one side for the mutual consideration of all parties concerned.'<sup>3</sup> The use that Faisal had for the Zionists becomes clear from the report of an interview with Weizmann in London towards the end of September 1919. 'I understand,' wrote Cornwallis in a note for the Foreign Office, 'that Dr. Weizmann, in return for the Emir's help in Palestine towards the realisation of Zionist aspirations, proposes to give money and advisers, if required, to the Arab Government and claims that the Zionists can persuade the French Government to waive their claims of influence in the interior. The Emir is strongly inclined to come to an agreement but matters are at present at a deadlock since the Emir asks the Zionists to throw their lot definitely with the Arabs against the French, while Dr. Weizmann is in favour of allowing the French to occupy the coastal districts saying that they can be squeezed out later.'<sup>4</sup>

Whatever Faisal's own views on Zionism, and whatever advantage he may have thought to gain from befriending it, the Palestinians, both Muslim and Christian, did not follow him in his plans. Their hostility to Zionism was strongly manifested from the beginning. Palestine, with a predominant Sunni Arab majority, was the most compact and homogeneous territory in the Levant. It was therefore the worst area perhaps which could have been chosen for a Jewish National Home. The Palestinian Muslims had seen the Zionists come and settle before the War, and they had also seen how the Ottoman Government, whether Old or Young Turk, had resisted their penetration of Palestine.<sup>5</sup> When the Sharif of

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, pp. 268-9.

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced in Antonius, pp. 437-9.

<sup>3</sup> *U.S. For. Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, vol. III, p. 891.

<sup>4</sup> *Documents I: IV*, pp. 421-2.

<sup>5</sup> It seems that in Abdul Hamid's time, the censorship forbade references to the boundaries of Palestine, to the Promised land, and to Abraham's Covenant; see *al-Manar*, vol. XV, 1912, p. 796. On the Ottoman policy towards the Zionists, see Manuel, chapters II-IV *passim*, and G. Young, *Corps de Droit Ottoman*, 1905-6, vol. II, pp. 155-8, where Ottoman regulations restricting Jewish immigration into Palestine are set out.

Mecca rose in rebellion the Muslims of Palestine remained unmoved. They supported the Ottoman Power firmly and continuously throughout the War. As Sunnis, they belonged to the dominant group in the Empire. 'Under the Ottoman Regime,' the Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husaini testified before the Royal Commission on Palestine, 'the Arabs formed an important part of the structure of the Ottoman Empire. It is wrong to say that the Arabs were under the yoke of the Turks and that their uprising and the assistance which was rendered to them during the Great War were merely intended to relieve them from such yoke. The fact is that under the Ottoman Constitution they enjoyed all rights and privileges, political and otherwise, on an equal basis with the Turks. . . . The Arabs had a complete share with the Turks in all organs of the State, civil as well as military. There were Arabs who held the high office of Prime Minister and Ministers, Commanders of Divisions and Ambassadors.'<sup>1</sup> The Muslims had seen nothing from the Young Turks to lead them to suspect that non-Muslims were being preferred to Muslims. In particular, Jamal continued and intensified the hostile policy towards Zionism. Zionist leaders were deported, and Jewish settlers, considered unreliable in a war area, were evacuated.<sup>2</sup>

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire did not, however, affect the morale of the Muslims of Palestine profoundly. During the War, Sharifian proclamations had been disseminated in Palestine. 'Come and join us,' these proclamations said, 'who are labouring for the sake of religion and freedom of the Arabs, so that the Arab kingdom may again become what it was in the time of your fathers, if God will.'<sup>3</sup> In 1919, such words had the prestige of victory behind them. Why should they be doubted, when Faisal was established in Damascus, the ally of the British Empire? But, on the other hand, here was the Balfour Declaration; the very vagueness of its terms excited both fear as to its real aims, and hope that the victors, confronted with sufficient show of opposition, might be persuaded to abandon it. For the Palestine Muslims could not envisage that foreign

<sup>1</sup> Palestine Royal Commission. Minutes of Evidence heard at Public Sessions, Colonial no. 134, 1937, p. 292. The pre-eminent position of the leading families of Muslim Palestine under the Ottomans, such as the Husainis and the Nashashibis, is described in A. N. Poliak, *Feudalism in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and the Lebanon, 1250-1900*, 1939, pp. 38-9 and 60.

<sup>2</sup> See Manuel, chapter IV, and the American Ambassador's dispatch of November 17, 1916, in *U.S. For. Rel., The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920*, vol. I, Washington, 1939, p. 786. The Ottoman authorities suspected the Zionists of supplying the Allies with information; their suspicions were not without foundation; see, for instance, A. Aaronsohn, *With the Turks in Palestine*, 1916.

<sup>3</sup> Text of Proclamation cited in R. Gordon-Canning, *Arab or Jew?*, n.d., p. 25.

Jews might be introduced into the country, to enjoy equal rights with them and perhaps one day to dominate over them. 'It is very true,' Yale wisely wrote, 'that the Syrians and the Palestinians for the greater part are easily overawed by power, but that depends to a certain degree upon the source of the power; the Palestinians will not be intimidated by the Jews, whom for centuries they have looked down upon and despised and considered as inferiors.'<sup>1</sup> Here lies the explanation of the vehement initial opposition of the Muslims of Palestine to Zionism. The contempt of the Zionists for the uncivilised Arabs was only equalled by the contempt of the Muslims for the upstart Jews.

The opposition of the Christians of Palestine to Zionism is also easy to understand. They had no reason to support the designs of foreigners and Jews with whom they could have no sympathy, against the opposition of the Muslims who were their neighbours and masters. Moreover, the situation of the Christians of Palestine at the end of the War made a policy of active opposition to Zionism inevitable. These Christians belonged, for the most part, to the Orthodox Church. Before the War, the Russian Government had, for its own ends, encouraged them to look upon Russia as their protector. The collapse of this Power left these Christians without their champion. In these circumstances, prudence dictated what inclination in any case counselled: to join the Muslims in resisting the Zionist intruders, and thereby repair somewhat the position which the collapse of Tsarist Russia had so dangerously weakened. The Russians had been concerned to fight Greek influence in the Orthodox Church. They had carried on a propaganda stressing the alien character of a Greek clergy ministering to an Arab-speaking laity. This feature of Russian pre-War policy facilitated the acceptance which Arab nationalist dogma later found among the Christians of Palestine.<sup>2</sup> But self-protection was the overwhelming reason for the support of the Christians for the Muslim position in Palestine. Elsewhere, the Zionist issue was absent, and the Christians showed their fear of Muslim dominance. If they were Maronites, they desired French protection; or, if they were Orthodox and fearful of both Catholics and Muslims, they desired British or American protection.<sup>3</sup> Gertrude Bell who visited Damascus in October 1919, described in a memorandum the state of affairs then obtaining. 'The Greek Catholic Patriarch, Monseigneur Qadhi, a man whom I have known and trusted

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report of May 27, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> See A. Bertram and J. W. A. Young, *The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem*, 1936, pp. 25 and 76-8.

<sup>3</sup> This was Yale's conclusion in a report (Y.P.II) which he wrote for the King-Crane Commission in July 1919.

for years, told me,' she wrote, 'that in the Christian Quarter only the presence of British soldiers kept the people from those attacks of panic which spread like contagion to the Moslems and bring the latter to arms in self-defence against the imagined danger. . . . "The chord of fanaticism," he said, "has a greater resonance than the chord of nationalism. The extreme party will reach the time when they can no longer play on nationalist sentiment; already it is almost worn out. Most Damascenes are tired of the long uncertainty which directly affects their prosperity. When they refuse to respond to the demands made on their patriotism, no alternative will remain but to revive the old religious hatred."'

In Palestine, then, the population, Muslim and Christian, was unanimous in resisting the Zionist policy of England. They had hopes that if the resistance were strenuous enough, English policy could be changed; for it seemed by no means certain that the English were firmly and irrevocably resolved to support Zionism. The Palestinians had heard of the Balfour Declaration when it was issued.<sup>1</sup> But they had seen no official indication of British intentions. Allenby refused to allow the Balfour Declaration to be published in Palestine. 'His policy', his biographer writes, 'was to administer it [Palestine], so far as possible, strictly under the international rules for enemy territory occupied in war. . . . This, Allenby considered, precluded any special privileges being accorded for Jewish settlement until the Peace Conference had given their decision.'<sup>2</sup> The Palestinians no doubt contrasted this propriety with the freedom given to Faisal in Damascus, and drew their own conclusions, which were perhaps erroneous, but not unwarranted. So the agitation against the Zionists continued. The announcement of the King-Crane Commission, indicating unsettled purpose in Paris, merely served to increase it.

Faced with the vehement opposition of the Palestinians, Faisal had no intention of showing public approval of the Zionists, however much he might encourage them in private. When Weizmann had seen him in Aqaba in April 1918, he, while giving it as his personal opinion that Dr Weizmann's wish to establish Zionist colonies 'was not incapable of

<sup>1</sup> 'In the meanwhile the Palestinians who have returned to Palestine with the British forces have taken with them copies of the Balfour Declaration and of the Syrian telegrams of protest and are prepared to arouse the Arabs of Palestine to make a similar protestation.' Y.P.II., Yale's report of November 26, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> Wavell, pp. 199 and 261-2. For the views of Allenby, Clayton and Money, the Military Administrator of Palestine, on Zionism, see *Documents I: IV*, pp. 272 n. 1, 282, 300, 325, 338 and 360; see also H. L. Samuel, *Memoirs*, 1945, p. 151. During 1919 and 1920, when he was the supreme authority in the Levant, Allenby continued to express his fear of violent action on the part of the Palestinians, should the Zionists be shown official toleration.

realisation', would not pronounce publicly in favour of Zionism since enemy propaganda might make such a pronouncement a pretext to allege that the Sharifians were in favour of giving Muslim lands to foreigners.<sup>1</sup> Faisal continued to give Weizmann the impression that he agreed with him and equally continued to refuse to commit himself in public.<sup>2</sup> 'Faisal', Cornwallis reported in May 1919, 'is beginning to realise the difficulties which he will have in reconciling the Palestinians and Zionists, and no longer treats the question as a minor one. He has abandoned his idea of having a conference here, but intends to ask various notables to visit him separately and endeavour to convert them.'<sup>3</sup> But at the end of May he was already indicating that he could not oppose the Palestinians in their plans of resistance. He asked the English Political Officers in Damascus 'what would be [their] attitude, having in view the fact that the Arabs in Palestine would probably rise. He was informed that such an act would finally and irreparably destroy all friendship between us, as it would probably entail the loss of British lives. He agreed that this would be the probable result, but asked what could he do.'<sup>4</sup> In September comes an explicit avowal that he is not able to face his own supporters. 'Faisal', wrote Meinertzhagen, '... wishes to repudiate his agreement with Weizmann for fear it may be construed as acquiescence in partition of Syria.'<sup>5</sup> The reasons for Faisal's misgivings are quite clear. 'In my opinion,' the Assistant Political Officer in Jerusalem wrote in August 1919, 'Dr Weizmann's agreement with Emir Feisal is not worth the paper it is written on or the energy wasted in the conversation to make it. On the other hand, if it becomes sufficiently known among the Arabs, it will be somewhat in the nature of a noose about Faisal's neck, for he will be regarded by the Arab population as a traitor. No greater mistake could be made than to regard Feisal as a representative of Palestinian Arabs . . .; he is in favour with them so long as he embodies Arab nationalism and represents their views, but would no longer have any power over them if they thought he had made any sort of agreement with Zionists and meant to abide by it. But it seems that he is capable of making contradictory agreements with the French, the Zionists and ourselves, of receiving money from all three, and then endeavouring to act as he pleases. This is an additional reason why his agreement with Weizmann is of little or no value.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I., Yale's report quoting from an account of Weizmann's meeting with Faisal by Colonel Joyce, who was attached to the Sharifian army.

<sup>2</sup> On Faisal's dealings with the Zionists, see M. Perlmann, 'Arab-Jewish Diplomacy 1918-1922,' in *Jewish Social Studies*, 1944, pp. 123-54.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>6</sup> *Documents I: IV*, pp. 364-5.



Just as Faisal found it difficult to disclose and defend publicly his understanding of April 1919 with Clemenceau, so he was unable to broach to his supporters the desirability of an understanding with the Zionists, which he himself seemed to favour. Faisal was the captive of his supporters. The young officers who had deserted to him during the War, or who came, in increasing numbers, to join his movement as soon as they were demobilised from the Ottoman army, were now the effective governors of Syria. These men had drawn their political lessons from the conspiratorial tradition of the Young Turks; and indeed many of them had been active in the Young Turk cause. They had seen clandestine action prosper, and treason and violence gain the victory. Now they were established in power, they enjoyed a subsidy from England,<sup>1</sup> they could levy taxes, conscript men and procure arms.<sup>2</sup> They had far-reaching ambitions; and they proceeded to consolidate their position and prepare for the further struggle.

These officers were organised in secret societies which overlapped with one another. The most important of them were, *al-'Ahd*, in which the military were organised, and the *Young Arab Party*, in which both civilians and military were to be found. 'As soon as Damascus had been entered, this society,' says Amin Sa'id of the *Young Arab Party*, 'was reorganised and an administrative committee acted in its name. . . . This committee controlled the government effectively and stood in the same relation to it as the Committee of Union and Progress in relation to the Turkish government; nothing was done except as it willed and ordered.'<sup>3</sup> These officers were determined to gain their end by whatever means available. They would intimidate their opponents, use violence on them, incite risings and insurrections. The unsettled conditions resulting from the War, the anti-Christian sentiment of the Muslim mass, and, as they hoped, the rivalry between England and France would secure them their ends. In the case of Syria, they could exploit a long-standing anti-French sentiment among the Muslims, which had been fostered by the Ottomans from the time of the Syrian disturbances in the middle of the nineteenth century. The agitation in which the Sharifian officers engaged plunged the country in turbulence. To take one instance of the kind of disorder these agitations promoted: Pichon, the French Foreign Minister, had declared in the French Chamber, on December 29, 1918, that France in-

<sup>1</sup> Amounting to £150,000 monthly, see *ibid.*, p. 529.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Bell noted in her report on *Syria in October 1919* that surplus British arms were being sold to the Sharifians up to a short while before her visit.

<sup>3</sup> Amin Sa'id, II, part I, p. 35.

sisted on her traditional rights in the Levant; this declaration reached Syria at the end of January 1919; at once the newspapers began attacking and insulting the French and accused the Eastern Christians of desiring a French protection. Meetings were held and tracts distributed in Aleppo, where a number of destitute Armenian refugees were living; the population attacked them and began a massacre. The British troops stationed outside Aleppo had to intervene, but not before some fifty Armenians had been killed.<sup>1</sup>

It was not only the Christians who were to be cowed. Anyone among the Muslim magnates who expressed a preference for French over Sharifian administration was also intimidated. Thus, Tahsin al-Askari, who was then a Sharifian official, mentions how 'at Aleppo the notables who favoured the French were threatened and compelled to cease their propaganda for the foreigners.'<sup>2</sup> Such were the preoccupations of the men who controlled Syria. Of the proper administration of the territory for which they were responsible they took no notice. The withdrawal of the Ottomans had left the government in chaos. 'The task before the Arabs would have taxed the capacity of a Western Power accustomed to the affairs of great cities. To the Arabs it was impossible. Most of the local notables were incompetent and corrupt; the men of the Hedjaz from Feisal down, had been accustomed only to the control of insanitary little desert towns and squalid villages. It was inevitable, moreover, that the Damascenes and the Hedjaz men should be from the outset divided by misunderstanding and active jealousy.'<sup>3</sup> This appreciation by the historian of the Australian army is confirmed from the experience of an English diplomat sent to help the Sharifians: 'There was no central financial authority,' writes Sir Robert Graves, 'and the officials at Damascus with whom I was put in touch were unable to give anything resembling accurate figures of revenue and expenditure. At Aleppo the wildest confusion reigned, and during two months I spent in Syria, I never succeeded in getting any estimates from that important province. . . . The estimates of revenue were of the vaguest description, but as far as I was able to make out, it was hoped that they would nearly balance the expenditure, though

<sup>1</sup> On the massacre of February 28, 1919, and its causes, see Jean Pichon, pp. 236-69 *passim*; and Kurd Ali, VI, pp. 117-19, which gives a Sharifian version of the incident. 'The Armenians,' says the narrator, 'tried very hard to implicate the Arab government in the crime committed against them; their pretext was the presence of soldiers and policemen in the places where they were molested, and the refusal of these to help the Armenians. But they abstained from helping the Armenians, or even took part in the attack on them, only as a result of personal feelings deriving from the general current of popular excitement, and not in obedience to orders from above.'

<sup>2</sup> Tahsin al-Askari, II, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> Gullett, p. 767.

I reckoned that the cost of collection would amount to no less than 37% of the gross receipts. As for the duplication of services, the most flagrant example was in the existence side by side of a Civil and a Military Governor in every district, and a fine instance of the multiplication of unnecessary officials combined with nepotism was to be found in Damascus itself, where more than forty relations of one important member of the Government had been appointed to paid administrative, judicial and municipal posts.<sup>1</sup> 'Some employee in the King's Court,' records Rashid Rida, 'twice stole the accounts book of the privy purse, and nobody who knew of the incident had any doubts as to the motives of the theft . . . , no investigation was made, and nobody was prosecuted, much less punished.'<sup>2</sup> The situation was summed up by Miss Bell in her memorandum *Syria in October 1919*. 'Comfortable, peace-loving Damascus is tired of a Government which is perceptibly worse than that of the Turks. Under the Arab régime there is less public security; the law courts are a trifle more venal, the high officials no less corrupt than their predecessors, though this is not a source of serious complaint, for nothing else is expected of high officials.'

The lieutenants and clerks of 1914 were transformed, in the space of five years, into Major-Generals and Governors of provinces. With no stake in the land, with no local interests to uphold and cherish, restrained by no local attachments, they swayed whither the gusts of doctrine and ambition blew. This was the true import and result of the Arab Revolt, that these men considered themselves the heirs of the Ottoman Empire. Ja'far al-Askari, the Governor of Aleppo, the son of a little officer and pugilist, of Turkish origin, who had been employed by Muhammad Pasha al-Daghistani; Yasin al-Hashimi Faisal's Chief of Staff, of the same social status as Ja'far, whose father had been mukhtar of one of the quarters of Baghdad; Nuri al-Sa'id, the son of a clerk in the accounts department of Baghdad province: among the three hundred or so Mesopotamian officers in Faisal's service, Miss Bell declared that she knew none, with the exception of one or two, who belonged to an influential Mesopotamian family.<sup>3</sup> The notables of Damascus disliked,

<sup>1</sup> R. W. Graves, *Storm Centres of the Near East, 1879-1929*, 1933, p. 319. His account is confirmed by Allenby in his statement before the Council of Four; see *U.S. For. Rel., Paris Peace Conf.*, V, p. 12. On Sharifian finances, see further Clayton's report of June 23, 1919, *Documents I: IV*, p. 288.

<sup>2</sup> *al-Manar*, XXIII, p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> *Syria in October 1919*; al-Umari, I, p. 380; in her memorandum Miss Bell seems to confuse Ja'far's antecedents with those of Yasin, see Khairi al-Umari, *Shakhsiyyat Iraqiyya (Iraqi Personalities)*, vol. I, Baghdad, 1955, pp. 85 and 110.

according to her, 'the upstart band of Baghdadis and Palestinians who are in authority over them, partly no doubt, from a natural desire to share in such spoil as may be available, partly from an uneasy feeling that the aliens . . . are in fierce pursuit of an exaggerated political ideal for the attainment of which, or on the offchance of its attainment, they are prepared to set the Syrian province in a blaze. . . . It is true that the fervent Baghdadi is equally prepared to set his own province alight, but that does not convince the Damascenes of his political devotion. They observe, not without some justice, that the Baghdadis who are with Faisal are not men of wealth and position in Mesopotamia, while the greater number have been absent from their province since they reached manhood and cannot be expected to have local interests at heart.'<sup>1</sup> Miss Bell's language is echoed by a local chronicler: 'Headstrong youths most of them strangers to the eastern zone of the four towns [Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Hama]', laments Kurd Ali, 'entered national politics. They acquired standing with Faisal, and power to do and undo. They kept away from him many important local men; and Faisal worked together with them, their chief support being drawn from among the youth and the popular mass. Political parties multiplied in Damascus, until there was more than eight of them, all of whom demanding, of course, the independence of Syria, and some demanding the independence of all the Arabs. Quarrels increased, and dissensions between the sons of the country, all of them indeed desiring its good, but not knowing the right way to attain it. . . .

'Men became discontented with Amir Faisal for relying on those who were strangers to the territory of the four towns and because he unjustifiably lacked confidence in the notables and wise men of the country. They secretly advised him to abandon this policy, and the notables of Damascus and its wise men sent him a delegation to advise him to follow a policy which would be in the general interest, but he paid no attention to their words. He even said to some gathering that these strangers on whom he relied had served him better than the Damascenes and that the latter were only interested in money. Events, however, have proved the contrary, but politics blackens what is white, and whitens what is black.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See also Meinertzhagen's report of November 19, 1919 (*Documents I: IV*, p. 523) for further details on political divisions in Syria.

<sup>2</sup> Kurd Ali, VI, p. 170. Kurd Ali notes with disapproval, *al-Mudhakkeirat*, vol. I, p. 232, that al-Rikabi was partial toward Palestinians, and gave them posts in the Sharifian Government. Ihsan al-Jabiri, then Faisal's Chamberlain, later wrote: 'It is true that some of the notables of Damascus who were used to occupying high positions under the former Turkish Government, became alarmed at the invasion of intellectuals from all classes who wanted to make the administration democratic. These notables preferred to ask for protection from the French liaison officer rather

The Sharifian officers now in power were determined to reach their end by force. When a Damascene stated at a meeting during the War that Syria would not submit to the rule of Husain, Ja'far al-Askari who was present said 'that if any part of the Arab world refused to submit to the King of Hedjaz, they would be forced by the sword. The Damascene said that the Christians would never submit to the King of Hedjaz and that civil war would result if it were attempted to force the Hedjaz government on Syria; Jaafar's reply was that if it needs must be by the sword, by the sword Syria would be compelled to accept the King of the Hedjaz.'<sup>1</sup> This was the temper in which Syria under Faisal was governed. But even the violence was, for the most part, windy and incompetent. Bluster was mistaken for valour, and improvisation for military genius. This is Miss Bell's description of Faisal's army in October 1919 after a year of organisation and training: 'A large proportion of the officers', she wrote, 'are Baghdadis. Some 7,200 is the present strength, out of a permitted 8,000, and this includes 400 officers above the prescribed number. It is an open secret that these additional officers are to be used to raise levies for guerilla warfare if resistance is offered to the French, but no protest against this breach of regulations has been made by us. Conscription was abolished when the Arab Government was established; nevertheless the Arab military council recently drew up a conscription order, including a six-monthly exemption fine of 36 L., which should have fallen on Christians and Jews. . . . There is no punishment for desertion. The troops are paid about 3 L. a month, and it is not unusual for men to desert in handfuls, whole villages at a time, after every pay day. No one supposes that the Arab army would face regular troops; it is not even believed that the Damascenes garrison, 2,000 strong, would stand up to the Beduins if they were to come in after we withdraw. . . . The Arab leaders know that the army will be no good to them against the French, and they rely on guerilla warfare and local levies. The whole country is armed to the tune of an average of two rifles per man, with ammunition sufficient to last a year.'<sup>2</sup>

Faisal had perforce to depend on these men. They wielded whatever power existed in Syria, and were ready to raise the mob in order to carry their point. He may have, at first, designed to use them in order to

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than lose their privileged position. They ended by forming a party of retrograde and reactionary malcontents who remained ineffective until the invasion of the French Army, *La Nation Arabe*, April 1930, p. 79.

<sup>1</sup> Y.P.I. Yale's report of September 12, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> *Syria in October 1919*. Miss Bell reckoned that there were 75,000 rifles in the Damascus area and somewhat less in the Aleppo area.

threaten the English and the French and, for this purpose, encouraged them in their agitations. Returning from Paris in April 1919, after his understanding with Clemenceau, he set the tone for them declaring in Beirut: 'Independence is taken, not given. The freedom of the nation lies in its own hand. Let us strive in unity and we will live an honourable life. Complete independence through absolute unity,' and in Damascus: 'The Syrian nation seeks absolute independence and will accept nothing else.'<sup>1</sup> When the King-Crane Commission was announced, he assembled the Arab Congress, to impress on the commissioners the unanimity of the representatives of Syria in their demand for independence. The Congress served the purpose well; but it did not disband afterwards, and became a centre of heady Jacobin oratory, and a potential threat to Faisal, should his policy cease to find favour in the eyes of its members.

Faisal's policy proved a failure. The British decided to break the deadlock with Clemenceau by coming to terms with him. Faisal therefore had no alternative but to seek an accommodation with the French. While he was away negotiating in Europe, in the autumn of 1919, rumours began to spread in Syria that Faisal had come to terms with Clemenceau and 'words of hate and enmity against His Highness [Faisal] spread by the nationalists began to be heard ceaselessly,' wrote the newspaper *al-Mufid* of Damascus in 1924, in the account of these events which it published, 'for these alleged that His Highness would not go with them to the end. It was then that the Syrian Congress was convened once again, and it decided to present a memorial to His Highness Prince Zaid [Faisal's brother whom he had left in charge] asking for a speedy declaration of Syrian independence with Prince Faisal as King.'<sup>2</sup> The situation which Zaid faced may be gathered from a telegram sent to Faisal at the time. 'Be sure', Zaid informed Faisal, 'that revolution will be at doors in event of this agreement taking place and which is against the wishes of population. . . .

'In spite of my best efforts to calm the excitement in order to facilitate you I am unable to resist swelling current through which blood will be shed and I shall not in any way hold myself responsible in case of (protest?) under heavy (burden?) which I beg be taken away from me and from nation in general.'<sup>3</sup> Faisal did reach an agreement with Clemenceau and tried on his return to Syria to gain approval for it. He tried to defend

<sup>1</sup> Amin Rihani, *Muluk al-Arab (The Kings of the Arabs)*, Beirut, 1924, p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Mufid's* account is reproduced in G. Kampffmeyer 'Urkunden und Berichte zur Gegenwartsgeschichte des Arabischen Orients,' *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen*, Berlin, 1924. The quotation is from p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 500. Zaid's telegram of October 27, 1919.

himself and to assert his authority over that of the secret societies. His most notable effort is a speech which he delivered in January 1920. 'I am still,' he said, 'the man you have imagined me to be. Whether you think well or badly of me does not interest me as much as my work and the future of the nation. I do not care what is said about me in praise or blame or otherwise. . . .

'I do not pretend to know what passes through the minds of people, but I take pride in one thing: I have loved my country and have striven for it. I have one object, which is to see my country independent. By God, I am afraid neither of the power of the government nor of the power of the [secret] societies; I am afraid rather of the future and of the verdict of History. . . . This is one and a half years that we are saying, Enough speeches, enough talk, our epoch is one of action not one of talk. . . . I was absent from this country four months, and no doubt History will keep a record of what I have done in the West, whether good or bad, much or little; I do not claim immunity from error, but I have spoken according to the dictates of my conscience. . . .

'I am the soul of the movement, and the nation, relying on the government, really relies on me, until the opportunity presents itself and we may have the possibility of constituting assemblies on which the nation may count, and this is why I do not allow, in these times, any person or any body to say that the Government is such and such, or to demand a change of ruler, because I am the only one responsible until a parliament can assemble.'<sup>1</sup>

Faisal was not then able to over-rule his supporters, for 'a shameful propaganda', says al-Shabandar, who was then a prominent member of his Government, 'was spread against him . . . and he retreated in disorder, because he was new to political problems.'<sup>2</sup> Faisal was compelled to go back on his agreement with the French, and to join in the bellicose gestures of the Syrian Congress, and this ultimately led to a clash with France, and to Faisal's eviction from Syria. The Congress became his master. A conversation with him, reported by Rashid Rida, shows to what pass things came, in the last months of Sharifian government in Damascus. Rashid Rida was the president of the Congress, and hostile to Faisal, out of belief that Faisal was ready to deliver Muslim lands to Christian control. The Congress had demanded the right to submit Faisal's administration to a vote of confidence: 'The King said,' writes Rashid Rida, 'that the Con-

<sup>1</sup> Amin Sa'id, II, part I, pp. 123-4.

<sup>2</sup> Abd al-Rahman al-Shabandar, 'Faisal ibn al-Husain' in *al-Muqtataf*, vol. 83, 1933, p. 261.

gress had no right to make such a demand because it was not a parliament. I replied that it certainly had the right, because its authority was greater than that of a parliament, for the Congress was a national constituent assembly. The King said, I have created the Congress and will not concede to it a right which might impede the action of the government. I said, It was the Congress which created you, for you were one general among the Allied generals under Allenby's command, and the Congress made you King of Syria.<sup>1</sup> At an interview with Yale in October 1919, Faisal expressed perhaps his most intimate sentiments when he said, in reply to a question by Yale, whether he would accept a particular solution to the Syrian question: 'I cannot say I will accept this or that solution, but I repeat I will accept any solution the United States imposes upon me.'<sup>2</sup> What was perhaps most in accord with his temperament and abilities would have been an imposed settlement by England, or France, or both together, leaving no scope for murmurs or manoeuvres. His misfortune was that the circumstances left nobody to impose a solution on him except his own violent followers.

Faisal's position in Syria was summarised in a report by Major Clayton, writing from Damascus on October 15, 1919. 'The feeling against the Sherifian family', he noted, 'has undoubtedly been growing in strength for some time. They have failed to appeal to the classes, who merely desire security owing to the miserable ineptitude of the Administration, and the encouragement, or at least tolerance, extended to the Bedouins, especially men like Nuri Shalaan. On the other hand, they are not sufficiently extreme for the more ardent Nationalists and the irreconcilable anti-French party.'

'The reports which reach Damascus of the state of affairs in the Hedjaz have not added to the popularity of Sherifian rule. King Hussein's name carries no weight whatever, and there is no question in Syria of accepting him as Caliph.'

'The request made by Emir Zeid on the 14th to be allowed to return to Mecca may mean that he realises that his position is becoming difficult. I can think of no other reason for his wishing to leave Syria. His position and that of Faisal is undoubtedly unenviable, since they are mistrusted and disliked by many of the people, and can hope for no active support from us.'<sup>3</sup> Only a year had passed since Syria was delivered into Faisal's hand and he was hailed as the conqueror of Damascus and the saviour of the Arabs. His tenure was a visible failure, satisfying nobody, and stamping

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Manar*, XXIII, p. 392.

<sup>2</sup> Y.P.II.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 566.



him in the eyes of all who dealt with him, whether English or French or Zionist or Arab, as a weak man unable to keep his promises. His failure was also the failure of the English policy which gave him so much power and authority. But, at the end of 1919, the full consequences of this failure had not yet manifested themselves. They were not, however, long in coming.

## II

In June 1919, the deadlock between England and France over the Syrian question was complete. Lloyd George claimed that the Sykes-Picot Agreement was out of date; Clemenceau asserted that on the contrary, it was the only document by which France consented to be bound. Lloyd George wished to introduce both Faisal and Wilson into the negotiation; Clemenceau strenuously tried to exclude them. He wished to garrison Syria with French troops, while Lloyd George, on the advice of Allenby, refused to agree to such a step. Acrimonious articles about the designs of England on Syria kept on appearing in the French press,<sup>1</sup> and querulous exchanges were being made between the two governments on the conduct of their agents in Syria.<sup>2</sup>

In September, Lloyd George decided to act. The French showed no signs of budging, there was no hope of American participation in the Eastern settlement, and the prospect of indefinite suspense in the area was unwelcome. A solution had to be found. Lloyd George worked quickly; he saw Allenby on September 9, and discussed the situation with him for two days.<sup>3</sup> On September 11, he sent a message to Clemenceau to arrange a meeting, and saw him on the 13th armed with an *aide-memoire*. He no longer talked of the Sykes-Picot Agreement being inadequate. On the contrary, his whole scheme was based on its provisions. At a meeting of the Heads of Delegations of the five Great Powers, on September 15, 1919, Lloyd George unfolded his plan: 'The withdrawal of British troops from Cilicia was to take place immediately. The British troops would also be withdrawn from Syria, beginning on November 1. Under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo had been included within the boundaries of the Arab State. He therefore proposed that the British troops should hand the garrison of these towns over to the Emir

<sup>1</sup> *Documents I: IV*, pp. 318, 320, 335, 349, 353 and 377 for correspondence between the British Embassy in Paris and the Foreign Office regarding these articles.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 274, 321, 327, 355 and 371.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 384.

Faisal. In other parts of Syria, west of the Sykes-Picot line, the garrisons would be handed over to French troops.' Lloyd George's scheme stipulated further that after the withdrawal of the British forces 'neither the British Government nor the British Commander-in-Chief shall have any responsibility within the zones from which the Army has retired.'<sup>1</sup> Instead therefore of occupying both the Lebanon and Syria, as Clemenceau had originally demanded, the French were to occupy only the Lebanon; but the British, on the other hand, were no longer to stand between them and Faisal in Syria. Clemenceau, the substance of his claim conceded, accepted. The deadlock was broken.

Faisal remained to be dealt with. He was summoned to London. He was still clinging to the hope of elbowing the French out of Syria. Before his departure to London 'Faisal freely discussed the situation', Meinertzhagen reported, 'reaffirming his policy of united Syria to the absolute exclusion of France and everything French.'<sup>2</sup> In London, Faisal's hopes were dashed. England had come to an agreement with France, and he was firmly bidden to do likewise. 'I urged Faisal,' wrote Curzon to his Ambassador in Paris on October 16, 1919, 'to go to Paris unaccompanied by any Englishman, and with no evidence of British inspiration or backing, to see Clemenceau personally; to put before him his own position with clearness, cogency, and moderation; to realise that this was in probability the last opportunity of coming to a friendly agreement with the French; that, in the interests of all parties concerned, Arabs, French and British, such an agreement was supremely desirable.'<sup>3</sup> Under these well-rounded phrases Curzon buried the policy which the British Government had tried to pursue since the fall of Damascus, a year before. Clemenceau's point was conceded: when Lloyd George had come out with his scheme in September, Clemenceau laid it down that 'it was for France to reach by herself a settlement with the Arabs of her zone . . . with neither Power intervening in the mandate of the others.'<sup>4</sup> Later, when Faisal was in Paris, a problem arose over the boundaries between the Sharifian and French zones of occupation and Curzon tried to intervene on Faisal's behalf; but his efforts proved unavailing. Kidston, the Head of the Eastern Department at the Foreign

<sup>1</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Series I, vol. I, 1947, p. 690. The *aide-memoire* of September 13, 1919, is printed on pp. 700-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 382, Meinertzhagen to Curzon, September 12, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 475. See also Curzon's letter to Faisal of October 9, 1919, pp. 444-9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 453. Clemenceau reiterated his position in a letter to the British Ambassador on October 14, 1919. *Ibid.*, pp. 468-9; and in a letter to Lloyd George of November 9, 1919, *ibid.*, pp. 520-2.

Office, summed up the position when he minuted a letter from Faisal protesting against the demands of the French, that he had informed the Sharifians that he did not 'see how we can help or intervene in any way. We should very strongly resent any French protest as to our action in Mesopotamia or even in the Vilayet of Mosul or on its borders, and the French position with regard to the Bekaa is somewhat analogous.'<sup>1</sup>

Faisal then had no choice but to take the road to Paris, which he did towards the end of October 1919. Negotiations between him and the French proved difficult, and he again tried to involve the British Government. 'He informs me,' wrote Derby to Curzon on November 21, 'no progress has been made in negotiations with French who have not met him in any way. He came to France on advice of British Government and has done all he can to find an honourable solution of question. . . .

'Emir in circumstances thinks that he had better leave for Syria as soon as possible. He does not wish to proceed in a French ship and he asks me to request you to [?] make] arrangements by which he could proceed in an English ship. . . .'<sup>2</sup> But, no British support forthcoming, Faisal had to negotiate by himself as best he could with Clemenceau. An agreement was eventually reached at the beginning of January 1920.<sup>3</sup> The agreement stipulated that the French would recognise and uphold the existence of a Syrian State which, in its turn, promised to call upon the French government 'and upon that government only' to supply it with the necessary advisers, counsellors and technical experts. No French troops were to be stationed in Syrian territory or to go into Syria except on the demand of the Head of the Syrian State in agreement with the French High Commissioner. In an annex to the agreement, the French promised to set up a special régime in Beirut to facilitate the flow of commerce between Syria and its markets overseas. Whether the agreement was hard and fast is not altogether clear. Faisal's agent in Paris stated 'definitely' that Faisal did not sign it. Colonel Waters Taylor who met Faisal on his arrival in Beirut from France on January 14, 1920, reported that Faisal 'has apparently come to an agreement with French but before signing it wishes to obtain consent of his people to its clauses.'<sup>4</sup>

Faisal came back to Beirut in a French warship, and made a public declaration in favour of co-operation with France; but to Waters Taylor he said that 'this agreement was largely distasteful to him, and would be unpopular with his people but that attitude of British authorities gave him no choice and that he had been [?] handed over] tied by feet and hands to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 554 and 591-2.

<sup>2</sup> Text of agreement, *ibid.*, pp. 625-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents I: IV*, pp. 543-4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 627 and 630.

French.' But he did, however, make an attempt to convince his followers to accept his agreement with Clemenceau. His most notable effort was the speech he delivered in Damascus in January,<sup>1</sup> remarkable for its tone of uneasy justification and uncertain authority. He failed to convince. A secret meeting of the Committee of the *Young Arab Party* which together with the officers of the 'Ahd, were the effective rulers of Syria, decided to reject Faisal's agreement with the French. 'The Amir', writes Amin Sa'id, 'defended his scheme and said that its refusal meant war with France. They said, We are ready to declare war on both England and France; and the meeting ended with the committee adamant in their refusal.'<sup>2</sup>

The matter was out of Faisal's hands. It is doubtful whether it had ever been in his power to control events. The conspirators and members of secret societies whom the circumstances of war had lifted to such vertiginous heights of power and authority had lost all sense of proportion. They believed themselves invincible. Bluster and complacency ruled their behaviour. They could, they thought, tackle single-handed both France and England. And they believed both to be afraid of them. They did not appreciate that their position was weak, that it depended on the efforts of some English sympathisers, and that if these ceased to have the ear of the Government in London they would be lost. They also believed that they had a right to be protected and championed by the English against any adversary who dared to oppose them. 'The new Hejaz administration worked hard to demonstrate its capacity for governing the city'; wrote the historian of the Australian Army, 'but its task was an almost impossible one. Jealous at once of the British who had done all or nearly all the fighting, the Hejaz men resented the presence of Australians in the streets. And yet, when a reliable guard was needed for Emir Said [al-Jazairi, whom the Sharifians had arrested], or any other work had to be done which called for capacity and striking force, light horsemen were pressed into the service.'<sup>3</sup> When the Sharifians heard that the British, following their September agreement with the French, were withdrawing from Syria, and leaving them face to face with the French, they would not believe that such a thing could happen to them: 'There was nowhere,' wrote Gertrude Bell after her visit of October 1919, 'any real belief that the British Army of occupation would be withdrawn from O.E.T. East,

<sup>1</sup> For Faisal's declarations in Beirut, see Amin Sa'id II, part I, pp. 122-3; for his Damascus speech, see above.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125. The members of the Committee of the *Young Arab Party* were then: Dr. Ahmad Qadri, Rafiq al-Tamimi, Ahmad Maryud, Sa'id Haidar, Tawfiq al-Natur, 'Izzat Darwaza and Shukri al-Quwatli.

<sup>3</sup> Gullett, p. 770.

West and North (Syria, the Lebanon and Cilicia), still less that it would be withdrawn immediately, and there was the same refusal to credit that France would receive the mandate for Syria.' All the Sharifians did was to threaten that if the British Army withdrew, they would abandon Syria to chaos.<sup>1</sup>

The British Army withdrew, and Faisal began his negotiations in Paris. His followers in Damascus were displeased. On October 21, 1919, Meinertzhagen reported anti-Sharifian agitation in Damascus.<sup>2</sup> As the negotiations in Paris advanced, and their news filtered to Damascus, the agitation against Faisal increased. In November, a national defence committee was set up to prepare measures of resistance against the French. It included popular leaders and members of the political parties. It levied contributions to a war fund, and organised the enrolment of volunteers.<sup>3</sup> The excitement mounted. 'No doubt,' wrote a Mesopotamian officer, a member of the *Ahd*, in a report for the British authorities, 'it is suspected that Faisal will accept an arrangement favourable to the French, and public opinion has veered so strongly in favour of the Turks that he will be accused, not only of selling Syria to the French but also of having betrayed Islam to the British by siding against Turkey during the war.' And his conclusion that 'the position is that a strong and determined body of men who absolutely control the army and probably the gendarmerie, is preparing to declare a holy war should circumstances permit', appears, in the light of the events which followed, sober and correct.<sup>4</sup> On December 12, according to Meinertzhagen, demonstrations against Faisal and his brother Zaid took place in Damascus. On December 14, Ali Rida al-Rikabi who was Chief Administrator of Syria under Faisal, was obliged to give way to men who were in favour of action against the French.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, when Faisal, on his return to Syria, found that he could not convince his supporters to accept the policy that he now advocated, he decided instead to follow their line of intransigent opposition to any agreement or compromise. He was no leader, and could not impose his will. His history shows that he yielded to the strongest pressure exerted on him at any particular moment. In the early months of 1920, it was the men of violence surrounding him who exerted the strongest pressure. The plans of these men was to raise the country against the French, to form bands to harass the French occupied zone, and to attack and terrorise the Christian

<sup>1</sup> *Documents I: IV*, pp. 478 and 490. Meinertzhagen to Curzon, October 17, 18 and 20, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.

<sup>3</sup> Amin Sa'id, II, part I, pp. 101-3.

<sup>4</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 569.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 614, Meinertzhagen to Curzon, January 13, 1920; Amin Sa'id, II, part I, p. 125.

communities which constituted the following of France in the Levant. The incidents began to increase in the last months of 1919, and continued in the first half of 1920, until Gouraud marched against the Sharifians, defeated them at Khan Maisalun and entered Damascus towards the end of July. In December 1919, the French garrison of Tal Kalakh in the Tripoli area was besieged and some of its men killed; an encounter between French troops and Arab volunteers was reported from Baalbek in the same month. At the beginning of January, Christian villagers in the Marj'ayun area, in southern Lebanon, were massacred and looted; in Antioch, later in the month, the French garrison was attacked. In March, there is a report of another attack on Antioch 'by an Arab volunteer band, who after a sanguinary fight in which the French lost fifty killed, occupied the town and hoisted the Arab flag. The band,' the report in *The Times* said, 'stayed some time and then left Antioch without a government.' In May, there are more attacks on Christian villagers in the Tyre area.<sup>1</sup> Conditions became very disturbed. In retaliation for the attacks on their zone, the French allowed bands to be formed in the Lebanon in order to carry the disturbances to the Sharifian zone.<sup>2</sup> In the general licence, sectarian animosities found scope to express themselves: the Nusairis, who were on the side of the Sharifians attacked the Isma'ilis, who were on the French side; lawlessness excited cupidity: the bands who were supposed to attack the Maronites in southern Lebanon went on to loot the Druzes, with whom they had no quarrel, and the Druzes joined forces with the Maronites.<sup>3</sup>

Besides the organisation and the encouragement of guerillas and terrorist bands, the Sharifians used another tactic to resist the French. They allied themselves to the Turks who, under Mustafa Kamal's leadership, were resisting by force the Allied schemes for the partition of Asia Minor, and notably the establishment of the Greeks in Smyrna and the French in Cilicia. Mustafa Kamal found it convenient therefore to foment unrest in Syria and Mesopotamia. Turkish propaganda spread actively. Proclamations by Mustafa Kamal were being distributed in October at Aleppo and Damascus.<sup>4</sup> The Sharifians, on their part, were willing to co-operate with Mustafa Kamal. Yasin al-Hashimi was in relations with the Turks. 'He is',

<sup>1</sup> For incidents in the Levant in 1919-20 see Amin Sa'id, II, part I, pp. 105-16; P. Lyautey, *Le Drame Oriental*, Paris, 1924, pp. 163-4, and *The Times*, December 29, 1919, and January 9 and 19, March 31, May 11 and 18, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> Kurd Ali, pp. 174-6.

<sup>3</sup> Paulus Mas'ad, *Libnan wa Suriyya qabl al-intidab wa ba'duhu* (*The Lebanon and Syria Before and After the Mandate*), vol. I, Cairo, 1929, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> *Documents I: IV*, pp. 478 and 566-9.

wrote Miss Bell, 'a late adherent to the Arab cause. He was serving in the Turkish Army until the occupation of Damascus, and was left behind wounded when the Turks retreated. He is now one of the extreme exponents of Arab independence as against a French mandate or any other form of foreign control. He is in touch with the Committee of Union and Progress and with Mustapha Kamal, and his personal sympathies are probably Turkish. If the Arab state collapses, I should say he would seek and find his fortune in the Ottoman Government. Meantime he has influence with Faisal, and dominates Zaid who acts for Faisal during the latter's absence. Yasin is the moving spirit of the *Ahd al Iraq*, the Mesopotamian League. . . . This person, according to Meinertzhagen, was 'the leading spirit' in Syria. 'Yasin', Meinertzhagen thought, 'is aiming at reinstating Turkish rule in Syria, not so much on national or pan-Arab grounds, as on those of personal power. . . . There is little doubt that at the present moment Yasin's influence has replaced for the bad the more moderate and reasonable influence of Feisal. He now carries with him the army and the majority of the people.'<sup>1</sup> It was presumably for his relations with the Turks that the British arrested Yasin on November 22, 1919, and interned him in Palestine.<sup>2</sup> But his arrest did not end the co-operation of the Sharifians with the Turks. In January 1920, the railway between Aleppo and Alexandretta was damaged to prevent the dispatch of French troops and war material to Cilicia.<sup>3</sup> In March, records Tahsin al-Askari, Maulud Mukhlis, a pillar of the Sharifian cause, then Commander in Dair al-Zor in eastern Syria, sent an emissary to the Turkish commander in Mardin and obtained from the Turks 100 cases of light arms and 500 artillery shells; a plan was made to extend help to the Turks by resisting the movements of French troops in Syrian territory and the destruction of bridges and communications between Syria and Turkey; in June 1920, the local authorities in Homs and Baalbek stopped the dispatch of arms to the French troops fighting the Turks. 'The Government in Damascus', says al-Askari, 'approved the measures taken by the authorities of Baalbek and Homs, but the pressure of General Gouraud on the Syrian Government compelled it to issue orders, in spite of the opposition of the patriots, to allow staff, arms and troops to pass through.'<sup>4</sup> At about that time, too, Faisal's defence minister, Yusuf al-Azma went to the Turkish frontiers and proposed military co-operation with the Turks.<sup>5</sup> 'The Syrian Government

<sup>1</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 523.

<sup>2</sup> He was released in May 1920; Amin Sa'id, II, part I, pp. 103-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Askari, II, pp. 92, 94 and 136.

<sup>5</sup> Amin Sa'id, II, part I, p. 149.

itself,' writes Sati'al-Husri who was then a member of Faisal's administration in Damascus, 'was not content with showing sympathy with [Mustafa Kamal's] movement, but helped it actively by preventing the French from utilising the railways to send ammunition and reinforcements for their forces in Urfa, Kilisse and Aintab. . . . This attitude taken by the Syrian Government towards the French demands gave the Turks valuable help.'<sup>1</sup>

Faisal had surrendered to his supporters and was acquiescent in their policy. But his surrender had an ambiguity hidden in it. He wanted perhaps to persuade himself that he was not powerless, that he was in control of the events; that, having secured the best terms from Clemenceau, without committing himself in return, he would now play off his turbulent officers against the French High Commissioner, and finally emerge as the triumphant peacemaker, the indispensable middleman, the beneficent broker. Thus, in February 1920, he visited Gouraud in Beirut and offered to calm the country down, provided Gouraud would accept official Sharifian agents in the Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> In May, he repeated his offer, and proposed military help against the Turks if certain territories under French occupation were added to the Sharifian zone.<sup>3</sup> But this was a vain and useless activity, since the French were rapidly losing patience with the disorders and obstructions they had to suffer, and since Faisal could never force a settlement on his supporters.

These were determined to resist to the end. In March they assembled the Syrian Congress, proclaimed Faisal King of Syria, and set up the full panoply of a state. This was a categorical sign that they would never agree to negotiate with the French. In April, a Conference of the Powers at San Remo gave the Syrian mandate to France. Faisal's Chief Minister was Ali Rida al-Rikabi. He was thought by the extremists not to share their determination to fight France to the last. They succeeded in winning the King to their side, and, after a secret meeting at which the King's chamberlain was present, compelled Ali Rida to resign. Hashim al-Atasi became Chief Minister on May 3, 1920. On May 8, a resolution of the Syrian Congress approved the decision of the new ministry to fight to the end.<sup>4</sup>

Gouraud decided to act. Having secured himself on one front by concluding an armistice with Mustafa Kamal, he sent troops to the disturbed areas in the Lebanon to put down the guerilla bands. Then, on July 14, he sent an ultimatum to Faisal demanding among other things, the accept-

<sup>1</sup> Al-Husri, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> Lyautey, p. 166; Amin Sa'id, II, part I, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> David, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Amin Sa'id, II, part I, pp. 143-7.



ance of the French mandate, the disbanding of the Sharifian army and the dismissal of the extremists among the followers.<sup>1</sup> The conditions of the ultimatum were designed to secure French control over the actions of the Sharifians. It expired on July 18. Gouraud's ultimatum threw the Damascus government into confusion; some of its members advised acceptance, others rejection. Allenby's advice was sought; he advised acceptance. Curzon was besought to intervene with the French: he refused saying that France had a prior right to Syria, and would be irritated by such a step.<sup>2</sup> The chiefs of the Sharifian army indicated that they had no means to arrest the advance of the French more than a few hours. Faisal decided to accept the ultimatum, but 'only in principle and in his personal capacity'. He wrote to Gouraud in this sense on July 18.<sup>3</sup> The news of Faisal's surrender spread in Damascus. The Syrian Congress, meeting on July 19, summoned the government before it. The government refused to appear and on the following day revoked the Congress, and began disbanding the army. Disorder in the city followed. Mobs looted the arsenals, broke into prisons, and began attacking Faisal's residence, the King inside shouting: 'I will not be threatened.'<sup>4</sup> The mob was at last dispersed by force, with many killed and wounded. Amin Sa'id's estimate is 200 killed; Rashid Rida's between 50 and 70.<sup>5</sup> In the meantime Gouraud had indicated that Faisal's reply was unsatisfactory, and demanded a more definite acceptance of his terms. He extended his ultimatum to July 21. Faisal sent his acceptance on July 20. He had hoped that this acceptance would avert a French occupation of Damascus, but Gouraud was determined to occupy and continued his advance. Faisal, on hearing this, decided to fight, and issued a proclamation to this effect on July 21.<sup>6</sup> But he hesitated afterwards, and asked Gouraud to receive an emissary for further negotiations. This proved fruitless and the French Army continued to advance. On July 24 it clashed with a detachment of Sharifian troops and of volunteers at Khan Maisalun, and on July 25 it entered Damascus.

On July 24, in the evening, Faisal left Damascus for al-Kiswa, a railway station on the outskirts, there to await events. On arrival at al-Kiswa, he seemed very agitated. 'All his movements', says Sati' al-Husri who was with him, 'showed that he was in a state of great agitation and anxiety. It

<sup>1</sup> For text of Gouraud's ultimatum see Amin Sa'id II, part I, pp. 167-74. Faisal had been informed unofficially of the terms of the ultimatum on July 11; see *ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> According to a telegram from the Secretary of State for India of July 20, 1920, in *Sir Arnold Wilson's Correspondence at the British Museum*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Husri, p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> Amin Sa'id, II, part I, 187, *al-Manar*, vol. XXII, p. 468.

<sup>6</sup> Amin Sa'id, II, part I, p. 191.

seemed to me, while observing him, that he was preoccupied with something which he wanted to hide from us. I said to myself, Perhaps he still hopes to reach agreement with the French and is awaiting some news which might facilitate this. It seemed after a while that my speculation was correct, for the King had sent Nuri al-Sa'id to meet the French, and had postponed all his decisions to await the outcome.<sup>1</sup> Nuri al-Sa'id sent reassuring news, and Faisal received other messages from his supporters in Damascus that all was not lost, that the French might still be induced to treat with him as the Head of the Syrian State. He therefore thought to gain their favour by appointing somebody agreeable to them as Chief Minister, and sent his chamberlain to invest 'Ala al-Din al-Durubi with this office. His chamberlain came back to him with the disquieting news that there was a rumour that he would be deposed on the ground of having left the capital. He therefore decided to return to Damascus, and the train took him back thither. On July 27 he was asked to leave Damascus. The French put a special train at his disposal, and he left for Dar'a and remained there until August 1, when the French compelled him to move on.<sup>2</sup> He went to Haifa where Sir Herbert Samuel, High Commissioner for Palestine, received him with official honours. *The Times* devoted two articles to the misadventures of the King, and called him a modern Saladin.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Al-Husri, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149-55.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, August 7 and 11, 1920.

## CHAPTER 7

### *Mesopotamia, 1918-1921*

BRITISH policy in Syria, in the two years following the end of the War, gives an impression of haste and improvisation. France was opposed, and Faisal supported; and then France was conciliated, and Faisal abandoned, not out of set purpose, and in pursuance of an aim clearly conceived, but out of whim and caprice, in deference to prejudices and abstract principles. There is however, a ground on which initial opposition to France—but not her subsequent conciliation—might be justified. It might be argued that England was an imperial Power first, and a European Power only second; that the needs of England's imperial policy overrode the requirements of her European policy; and that to have given in to the French demands may have been, in the circumstances, necessary, but nonetheless regrettable. It is possible to determine whether, in fact, an imperial policy existed, by examining the events in Mesopotamia, and the English conduct of Mesopotamian affairs during the same period. For here, the issues were purely imperial, and no European considerations or interests impinged at all.

#### I

As the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the McMahon-Husain Correspondence show, the British Government considered the possession or control of Mesopotamia vital to imperial security. At the beginning of the War no long-term Mesopotamian policy had existed. The Expeditionary Force from India set out with strictly limited aims, which were to secure Basra and control the Persian Gulf. After the occupation of Basra, the Secretary of State for India, in a telegram towards the end of November 1914, declared: 'We are not at present able to do more than assert, as we have, our paramount claims and powers at the head of the Persian Gulf.'<sup>1</sup> But success encouraged hopes of conquest inland. Sir Percy Cox, the Chief Political Officer of the Expeditionary Force pressed, in a telegram of November 23, 1914, for a further advance; and his language serves to indicate the lines of official thought on Mesopotamia. 'After earnest consideration of

<sup>1</sup> Moberley, vol. I, p. 137 n.

the arguments for and against,' Cox wrote, 'I find it difficult to see how we can well avoid taking over Baghdad. We can hardly allow Turkey to retain possession and make difficulties for us at Basra; nor can we allow any other power to take it.'<sup>1</sup>

The British Government adopted the policy advocated by Cox, and after many setbacks and misadventures, Baghdad was at last occupied in March 1917. It became imperative for the Government to lay down a policy for the guidance of its agents. Instructions from the War Cabinet were telegraphed to Baghdad and Delhi on March 29, 1917. 'Basra . . . , these instructions said, '[is] to remain permanently under British Administration. . . . Baghdad to be an Arab State with local ruler or government under British Protectorate in everything but name. It will accordingly have no relations with foreign Powers. . . . Baghdad to be administered behind the Arab facade as far as possible as an Arab province by indigenous agency and in accordance with existing laws and institutions.'<sup>2</sup> Whatever may be thought of these instructions as guides for the actual administration of the territory, there is no doubt that they were drafted to conform with McMahon's pledge to Husain, and with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which it was then the intention of the Government to carry out.<sup>3</sup> In November 1918, on the occasion of Sir William Marshall's assumption of the Mesopotamian Command in succession to General Maude who had died, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff telegraphed to the new Commander the instructions by which he was to be guided: 'The prime mission of your forces,' these instructions began, 'is the establishment and maintenance of British influence in the Baghdad wilayat.'<sup>4</sup> Early in 1918, President Wilson's Fourteen Points were published. The principles they laid down conflicted with the general scheme of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and A. T. Wilson who was acting for Sir Percy Cox,<sup>5</sup> then absent from Baghdad, enquired what bearing President Wilson's Principles were to have on the administration of the country.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Despatch cited in P. W. Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development*, 1937, pp. 96-7.

<sup>3</sup> See above, chapter V, p. 110.

<sup>4</sup> A. T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties* (hereafter cited as *Loyalties II*), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Arnold Talbot Wilson, 1884-1940. Educated at Clifton and Sandhurst. Commissioned in 1903. Joined the Indian Political Department in 1908; Assistant to Sir Percy Cox, Resident and Consul General in the Persian Gulf, 1904-14; Deputy Chief Political Officer, Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force, 1914; Acting Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, 1918-20, in place of Cox, appointed Minister in Tehran. Entered House of Commons 1933, as Conservative Member for Hitchin. Joined the Royal Air Force in 1939, and was killed in action over France, May 1940.

'I was referred, in reply,' writes Wilson, 'to the instructions given in 1917 that "no large or controversial administrative questions were to be raised."' <sup>1</sup> A few days before the armistice, the Anglo-French Declaration which promised 'to encourage and assist in the establishment of indigenous Governments and Administrations in Syria and Mesopotamia' was issued; Wilson protested from Baghdad that this declaration was mischievous, since it involved British officials 'in diplomatic insincerities which we have hitherto successfully avoided.'<sup>2</sup> He was informed from London that the purpose of the Declaration 'was primarily to clear up the existing situation in Syria which Arab suspicion of French intentions had created.' The implication of this statement is that the Declaration, though it referred to Mesopotamia, was meant to apply only to Syria; for the India Office despatch which gave this gloss on the Declaration continued as follows: 'It will doubtless be necessary to establish at first a large measure of supervision by the British and to retain the control of foreign relations entirely in British hands. . . . We do not, however, contemplate annexation, nor, as far as can be seen at the moment, to make a formal Declaration of Protectorate. An analogy might be made to the position of Egypt before the war, exclusive of the capitulations.'<sup>3</sup> At the Armistice, therefore, it would seem that while the idea of a formal annexation of Basra to the Crown was abandoned, it was envisaged that England should control and administer the Mesopotamian territory as English Consul-Generals administered Egypt from 1882 to 1914. 'We in Iraq had been led to believe until the moment of the Armistice,' Wilson wrote later, 'that the policy envisaged by the British and the French Governments in the Middle East was one in which the principles and methods followed by Lord Cromer in Egypt would, with suitable modifications, find acceptance both on the spot and at home.'<sup>4</sup> It does not seem that such a belief was then erroneous. In April 1919, after much discussion, Wilson proposed to the Inter-departmental Committee on Eastern Affairs in London a scheme for the government of Mesopotamia which provided for the region to be ruled by a British High Commissioner assisted by provincial councils enjoying 'considerable powers, but not at present to be made responsible for legislation.' Wilson's proposals rested on the assumption that 'British Control however expressed in words will be effective in practice and will be ensured by retention of adequate military and air forces.'<sup>5</sup> These proposals were approved by the British Government.<sup>6</sup> The delay in the con-

<sup>1</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>4</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 114.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119 and 123.

clusion of the Peace Treaties, the quarrel with France over the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the uncertain status of the province of Mosul exposed Wilson's scheme to alterations, some of which would have proved radical; but the intentions of the British Government seemed set and beyond question. When Faisal was proclaimed King of Syria in March 1920, Mr Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, suggested, as a means of preventing conflict, the recognition of Faisal's sovereignty over Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia, but with the administration of Syria in the hands of the French, and that of Palestine and Mesopotamia in the hands of the British.<sup>1</sup> Again, when the international complications were solved and England received the mandate for Mesopotamia, the discussion on the future of this territory seemed to proceed on the same assumptions. The Inter-departmental Committee on Eastern Affairs discussed, on May 17, 1920, modified proposals, sent by the Acting Civil Commissioner.<sup>2</sup> 'The proposals, to the Inter-departmental Committee, seemed to set up a government based on an "Anglo-Indian" ideal, whereas the Committee believed in something more approaching an "Indian State" ideal.'<sup>3</sup> The discussion was, then, still confined within such alternatives not very different from one another: annexation, protectorate, or a system similar to Cromer's in Egypt; an Anglo-Indian type of administration, or one modelled on that of an Indian State; 'Mr Montagu wished to say that a representative national government was to be created, while Lord Curzon hesitated to commit himself so far';<sup>4</sup> the mandatory principle might be thought to provide a satisfactory basis on which to rest the new order of things, or it might, as Wilson held, be 'the worst kind of diarchy';<sup>5</sup> the discussion was decorous and reasonable, and seemed to proceed on familiar lines. And yet, all these assumptions, and all the plans built on them in May 1920, were to be discarded in only a few months' time.

This happened because English policy in Syria could not remain without effect on the English position on Mesopotamia. In Syria, the British Government seemed, in 1919, to support Faisal and to act according to the views of Lawrence and his friends. Now, Lawrence objected to British policy in Mesopotamia, as much as he did to French policy in Syria. He believed that it would have been possible to win the Mesopotamia campaign with the help of dissident Ottoman officers, as he had convinced himself that

<sup>1</sup> Telegram from Montagu to Wilson, March 19, 1920, in *Wilson's Correspondence* at the British Museum.

<sup>2</sup> These proposals are set out in *Loyalties II*, pp. 242-7.

<sup>3</sup> Ireland, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> Young, p. 309.

<sup>5</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. xi.

the Syrian campaign had been won by Sharifian forces.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the Government of India, according to him, had, by 'brute force' occupied Basra. When Baghdad fell in 1917, the Sharifians had asked that 'Iraq should be within the administrative province of King Husain, and that a mission of Arab volunteer officers should be sent to Baghdad in order to conduct propaganda to gain volunteers for the Arab Army and to make people understand the nature of the Arab movement and the rights of the Arabs.'<sup>2</sup> The request was not granted. When the War ended, Lawrence lost no time in urging the Sharifian claims on Mesopotamia. 'Colonel Lawrence, now home on leave from Syria,' telegraphed the Secretary of State for India to Delhi and Baghdad on November 18, 1918, 'has submitted proposal to H.M. Government for dealing with Arab Question. He advocates viz.: 1. Lower Mesopotamia, 2. Upper Mesopotamia, 3. Syria, to be placed respectively under Abdullah, Zeid and Feisal, sons of King Hussein. Hussein himself would remain King of Hejaz and would ultimately be succeeded by his eldest son Ali. He would have no temporal authority in three states above-mentioned and in fact no position at all there save insertion of his name in Friday prayers in all mosques as Emir el Momenin.'<sup>3</sup> In reply, Wilson vehemently dissented. He urged the Government 'to exclude this country definitely once and for all from any contemplated Sharifian settlement';<sup>4</sup> and in a further telegram, four days later, he confessed himself 'strongly opposed' to a Sharifian ruler in Mesopotamia.<sup>5</sup> Wilson instead proposed that 'Sir P. Cox should be appointed High Commissioner for the first five years without any Arab Amir or other head of the State, but with Arab Ministers backed by British Advisers.'<sup>6</sup> The substance of this proposal was accepted by the Government in April 1919.<sup>7</sup> Neither Lawrence nor the Sharifians, however, ceased their efforts to defeat Wilson's policy. In January 1919, the Mesopotamian officers in the Sharifian Army addressed a letter to the British authorities, 'welcoming the Anglo-French Declaration as an indication that no part of Iraq was to be under foreign rule.'<sup>8</sup> In June 1919, 'Faisal himself wrote to General Clayton . . . a letter in which he suggested that the "severity" of the British authorities in Mesopotamia had begun, though only gradually, to turn away the affection of the people. . . . Lord Curzon . . . thought that it [the letter] savoured of impertinence. . . . [On] the 20th June a further dispatch from General Clayton found its way to

<sup>1</sup> S.P., pp. 58-9.

<sup>2</sup> Nuri al-Sa'id, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Ireland, p. 156.

<sup>4</sup> Cited *ibid.*, p. 157, Wilson to Secretary of State for India, November 20, 1918.

<sup>5</sup> Cited *ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>7</sup> See above, p. 177.

<sup>8</sup> Ireland, p. 189.

the Foreign Office in which he forwarded and supported a similar representation from the Baghdadi officers themselves, who demanded the immediate establishment of a National Government in Mesopotamia.<sup>1</sup> At the same time the delegation of the Hijaz in Paris sent to Lloyd George a memorandum by Nuri al-Sa'id designed 'to prove the necessity of forming one united government of the liberated provinces of Syria and Mesopotamia.'<sup>2</sup> When Faisal came to London in September 1919, and efforts were made to induce him to reach agreement with the French, Lawrence offered to Curzon to persuade Faisal, but in return he required 'an assurance that our pledges with regard to the Arab character of the Government of Mesopotamia hold good' and that Sir Arnold Wilson would be relieved of his duties there.<sup>3</sup> Another Sharifian sympathiser was Sir Hubert Young, who was at the Foreign Office where he dealt with Middle Eastern questions and acted as secretary to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Eastern Affairs. 'I myself,' he writes, 'had no illusions about Arab efficiency. But I was in full sympathy with Arab aspirations. . . . I had seen Arab Governors and military Commanders during my time in the Western theatre [Palestine and Syria], a large percentage of whom were Mesopotamian by origin. I knew quite well that they represented only a minority, but the minority who are capable of exercising responsibility, however inefficiently from our point of view, can always sway the vast majority who are not, and I had seen enough of the majority at Basra, Nasiriyah, Baghdad, and elsewhere, to realise how easily swayed they were, and how dangerous they could be if they were really roused.'<sup>4</sup> Being a sympathiser with Sharifian claims from such prudent reasons, he was anxious at the trend of events in Mesopotamia. He had a talk with Nuri al-Sa'id in London in November 1919, from which it transpired that Wilson's administration in Mesopotamia did not, as the English officers in Syria, work 'on the assumption that the Arabs were managing their own affairs, and that it was not for them to do more than make friendly suggestions for the improvement of their plans.' This state of affairs displeased Nuri al-Sa'id and his brother officers, and also Sir Hubert Young. He became 'more than ever convinced that an immediate change was required in the spirit of our administration in Mesopotamia.' He impressed this conviction so well on Curzon that the Foreign Secretary became 'seriously alarmed'; what contributed to his condition was a

<sup>1</sup> Young, pp. 286-7.

<sup>2</sup> Text of memorandum in *Documents I: IV*, p. 297. A reply to the memorandum was sent on August 9, 1919, in terms described in Young, p. 293.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 422. Lawrence to Curzon, September 25, 1919.

<sup>4</sup> Young, pp. 291-2.



report to which Young drew attention, to the effect that of the two hundred and thirty-three British officers employed in Mesopotamia only four were over forty-five years of age.<sup>1</sup> Curzon sent a telegram to Sir Percy Cox in Tehran. 'Present situation in Mesopotamia', it said, 'is causing us considerable anxiety. . . . It is for the most part in the hands of young officers necessarily lacking in age and experience . . . we receive very disquieting reports from some of our own officials who witness with growing anxiety the existing trend of administration.'<sup>2</sup> Cox coolly replied: 'It is not quite clear whether your reference to youth and inexperience of officers employed refers to military or civil administration. If to latter, I do not think that it is altogether justified. . . . I note officers in charge of principal Departments and those permanently in charge of divisions are almost all senior men of much administrative experience and mostly my own nominees to those or similar posts. . . .

'As to disquieting reports received from our own officers I cannot comment without knowing who they are, but it may be that they are also referring to effect caused by character of Mesopotamian Administration or other Administrations with which they are connected.'<sup>3</sup>

The Sharifians did not rest content with presenting memoranda and making appeals to London. They extended their action to Mesopotamia. 'The Mesopotamians in Faisal's Army,' wrote Miss Bell in her *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*, 'who were at the root of the nationalist agitation, were doubtless finding their position in Syria a difficult one. There was a growing tendency on the part of Syrians to claim for themselves the important posts held by men whom they regarded as foreigners, and the Mesopotamians saw their prospects in Syria diminishing without, as they thought, any hope that their services would be acceptable in their own country should the British Government be entrusted with the mandate. A Mesopotamia free from British control seemed alone to offer them hope of office.'<sup>4</sup> Once established in Syria, then, these officers started to seek channels to carry the agitation into Mesopotamia. These channels were easy to find, as there were numbers of Mesopotamian officers demobilised from the Ottoman army and being repatriated who, passing through Syria, could be asked by their brother officers to become the agents of Sharifian propaganda in Mesopotamia. For instance, Muhammad Tahir al-Umari mentions the experience of his

<sup>1</sup> Young, pp. 297-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 531.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 551.

<sup>4</sup> *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia 1914-1920*, compiled by Miss G. L. Bell for the Acting Civil Commissioner. Cmd. 1061 (1920), (hereafter cited as *Review*), p. 138.

brother who was, at the end of the War, an officer in the Ottoman Army at Constantinople. He was demobilised and he started on the journey to Mosul, his native town; on the way, he passed through Aleppo, in December 1918: 'I found', says the brother, 'that an Arab Government had been formed, and I rejoiced. I met some of my friends and some of the leaders of the administration and formed an idea of the situation. I then left Aleppo . . . and reached Mosul carrying with me tracts and information on the Arab Question.'<sup>1</sup> From the end of the War until the middle of 1920, when disturbances started in Mesopotamia, many such workers were enrolled in the Sharifian cause. 'The dissatisfied elements of ex-Turkish employees had received considerable reinforcements during the eighteen months which had elapsed since the armistice. Among their numbers', records the *Review*, 'were officers who had served in the Arab Army and had witnessed the course of events in Syria. . . . The contrast between the two Arab provinces [Syria and Mesopotamia] which had been freed from Turkish rule gave point to the complaints of the malcontents. . . . They argued that the creation of the Syrian State was due to the victory of Arab arms and that similar liberties in Mesopotamia could be gained only by a successful resort to force.'<sup>2</sup> Sharifian propaganda in Mesopotamia was well organised. The secret society, *al-'Ahd*, controlled as it was by Mesopotamian officers,<sup>3</sup> carried on an extensive correspondence with sympathisers and sent funds to them.<sup>4</sup> Branches of the society were established in Mosul, Baghdad and Basra, 'and their communications with Headquarters,' writes an early chronicler, 'were well organised. Mosul played the chief part in consolidating the links between Damascus and the branches in Iraq.'<sup>5</sup> The agitation was not, it seems, confined to the Arabs but was carried to the Kurds. From Baghdad, records *The Arab Bulletin* of June 24, 1919, reports of Sharifian propagandist activities in Iraq were received. The Sharif, it seems, had written to Sheikhs of Tai and Shammar, pointing out that they cannot accept the rule of

<sup>1</sup> Al-Umari, vol. I, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> *Review*, p. 139. In a report of December 1, 1919, an extract from which is found in *Wilson's Correspondence* at the British Museum, Colonel C. E. Vickery, writing from Jeddah, drew attention to the ex-sergeants of the Ottoman Army, now colonels in the Sharifian force, drawing pay at £75 a month, who were passing through Jeddah on their way to Baghdad.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Askari, vol. II, p. 4, lists Yasin al-Hashimi, Nuri al-Sa'id, Jamil al-Midfai, Taufiq al-Suwaidi, Maulud Mukhlis and Isma'il Namiq among those active in the society in Damascus.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Askari, vol. II, p. 7, and *Review*, p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Mahdi al-Basir, *Tarikh al-qadiyya al-'Iraqiyya* (History of the Iraqi Question), Baghdad, 1924, vol. I, p. 114.

the British, who are Christians, advising them that their policy should be to help the Sharifian Government with its plans for Arab independence, and suggesting that they should follow the example of the Kurds who had proved troublesome to the British administration. The Sharif was taking a lively interest in Kurdish affairs and had asked the Tai Shaikhs to forward his message to the Rashyan Kurds.<sup>1</sup>

Wilson's administration does not seem to have dealt successfully with this agitation. It may have been ignorant of the full extent of the propaganda until too late, it may not have had detailed knowledge of the ramifications of the Sharifian organisation, or it may have under-estimated its importance. Sharifian activities moved Wilson to protest to Curzon in June 1919, and Curzon passed on his protest to Clayton: 'Civil Commissioner Baghdad suggests that as the Arab Army is still financed entirely from His Majesty's Treasury, pressure should be brought to bear upon Sharif Faisal to restrict his activities and those of his staff to Syria.'<sup>2</sup> The protest seems to have had no result. It would have been very difficult to control the movements of agents on the long and vague frontiers between Syria and Mesopotamia in the face of complicity by the relations, friends and co-religionists of the Sharifians. The impression however remains that Wilson was not firm enough in his policy. In the summer of 1919, it was possible for Jamil al-Midfai and two companions to travel openly from Syria to Mosul and Baghdad, contacting sympathisers and concerting future action with them. They were, it is true, asked to leave but they managed to remain long enough to finish their business.<sup>3</sup>

One step advocated by Sir Arnold Wilson and authorised by the British Government proved to be, on his part, a miscalculation which benefited, in the end, the Sharifian cause in Mesopotamia. When Wilson was confronted with Lawrence's proposal of November 1918 to install sons of the Sharif as rulers of different parts of Mesopotamia, he, imagining no doubt finally to discredit such suggestions, proposed to hold a plebiscite to ascertain the opinion of the country; 'on the clear understanding on which the inhabitants of the country themselves rely that a protectorate will in due course be declared and that for the present military administration will continue,' he wrote, 'I am prepared to arrange

<sup>1</sup> See also G. R. Driver, *Report on Kurdistan and the Kurds*, Jerusalem 1919, p. 98. The Sharifians later incited the Kurds of Syria to attack French communications; see al-Askari, vol. II, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Midfai's account in Fariq al-Muzhir al-Fir'aun, *al-Haqaiq al-nasi'a fi'l-thaura al-iraqiyya, sanat 1920 wa nata'ijuha* (*The Truth about the Iraq Revolt of 1920 and its Results*), vol. I, part I, Baghdad, 1952, p. 335.

for this in a manner consonant with educated opinion and not inconsistent with the maintenance of public order.’<sup>1</sup> He counted, rightly, on the fact that the Sharifians were quite unknown in the area, and on the political tradition of a country like Mesopotamia, which holds it dangerous to express dislike of the ruler of the moment, to obtain evidence with which to support the policy he was urging on the Government in London. ‘The English,’ the Naqib of Baghdad said to Miss Bell in February 1919, ‘have conquered this country, they have expended their wealth and they have watered the soil with their blood. The blood of Englishmen, of Australians, Canadians, Muslims of India and idolators has drenched the dust of Iraq. Shall they not enjoy what they have won? Other conquerors have overwhelmed the country. As it fell to them so it has fallen to the English. They will establish their dominion. Khatun, your nation is great, wealthy and powerful: Where is our power? If I say that I wish for the rule of the English and the English do not consent to govern us, how can I force them? and if I wish for the rule of another, and the English resolve to remain, how can I eject them? I recognise your victory. You are the governors and I am the governed. And when I am asked what is my opinion as to the continuance of British rule, I reply that I am the subject of the victor.’<sup>2</sup>

The results of the plebiscite vindicated Wilson’s expectations: ‘The upshot of the enquiries is that the majority desired no change of régime, a large minority favoured an Arab Amir under British guidance and control, and that no name we could suggest commanded the acceptance of even a small minority.’<sup>3</sup> But however desirable as a tactic of the moment, the plebiscite was not, from Wilson’s point of view, a judicious thing to undertake. His principles of government and his experience of the East alike should have shown the futility and danger of such expedients. The results of his misjudgment were not slow to appear. ‘The tribes,’ wrote Bertram Thomas, who was at the time a Political Officer in southern Mesopotamia, ‘had never been invited to help frame a constitution before, and they usually replied—this to ingratiate themselves with their present masters—that the British were a most desirable connection. Gradually of course, the man “with his senses in his eyes” got a feeling of promotion in his blood. Up to this time he had thought that only Allah could shift the British, and he would behave accordingly: now he had it put into his head that he had only to flout authority and the British would remove themselves. He thus became a ready tool for agitators, religious

<sup>1</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 338.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114. For detailed results of the plebiscite see *Review*, pp. 127-8.

and Nationalist, and these in turn found nourishment in the British Press, a section of which was loud with propaganda against the Mesopotamia "adventure" and with a demand to cut the painter.<sup>1</sup> Miss Bell's account in the report on *Self-Determination in Mesopotamia* which she wrote at the time, and in the section of the *Review* devoted to these events gives more details of the effervescence which the plebiscite occasioned. 'Meantime,' she wrote in her report, 'a campaign of political agitation was being organised in Baghdad. The leaders of the movement were men under 30, two of them being members of good families, while the rest were of no position, social or economic. The greater number had recently returned from Mosul and a considerable proportion of the group were ex-Committee men; one at least was a Turk by race. . . . [One] of the younger Shi'ahs of Baghdad went to Najaf, nominally on private business, and proceeded to engineer a deliberate plot, the object of which was to dissuade the people of Najaf and Shamiya by playing on their religious feelings and on the personal pride of certain Shaikhs, from signing a petition on the lines which had been agreed upon [i.e. requesting British control]. The author of this agitation is a man of considerable reputation as a writer. He has been employed by us in the Police and had been dismissed for brutal conduct about a year previously. As he himself subsequently signed . . . in favour of the continuance of British control, his value as a witness on the other side is negligible. . . .

'The agitation, however, continued, and achieved its next partial success in Karbala. The Persian priesthood of that town issued a fatwah to the effect that any person who desired other than a Muhammadan Government was an infidel. . . .

'Exaggerated accounts of the proceedings at Najaf and Karbala reached the inhabitants of the third Shi'ah holy city, Kadhimain, where feeling was already running high. There is evidence to show that at Kadhimain agents from Constantinople had been at work, and they found suitable material to their hand. . . . When, therefore, the town of Kadhimain was asked to give its views . . . , the 'ulama threatened with excommunication and exclusion from the mosque anyone who voted for British occupation.'<sup>2</sup> The upshot of all this may be gathered from the *Review*: 'The Jewish community, which is the most wealthy in Baghdad, and comprises considerably more than a third of the population,'<sup>3</sup> took alarm at

<sup>1</sup> B. Thomas, *Alarms and Excursions in Arabia*, 1930, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Loyalties II*, pp. 331-3.

<sup>3</sup> 'It was estimated before the War,' wrote Sir Edgar Bonham Carter in a report of 1917 quoted in the *Review* (p. 94), 'that the population of the Baghdad Wilayat

the windy and violent oratory in the coffee shops, and sent in a unanimous petition asking to be allowed to become British subjects if an Arab Government were set up in Mesopotamia. The Christians, a small body, about 1/25 of the whole population, were equally perturbed and declared that the attitude of the Moslems towards themselves was becoming truculent. . . . The Qadhis of the Sunni and Shi'ah sects were asked to select 25 notables of their respective creeds, the Grand Rabbi 20 leading Jews, and the heads of the Christian communities 10 Christians. The Qadhis either by intent, or under religious and political pressure, did not execute their task loyally. With considerable difficulty they produced a packed assembly, in which the heads of the leading Moslem families declined to take part on account of its advanced tendencies; the Jewish and Christian elements withdrew from it for the same reasons, while the assembled Moslems signed a petition in which they expressed their preference for an Arab State headed by a Muhammedan King who should be one of the sons of the Sharif.<sup>1</sup> The concluding remarks of Miss Bell's report on *Self-Determination* sum up the consequences of Wilson's move: 'Given the short period of time, it would have been difficult to arouse more sound and fury, not to speak of heart-burnings and intrigue, than have been created in Baghdad by the declaration [of November 8, 1918] and the enquiries into the will of the people which ensued from it. The only justification which in the light of experience can be put forward for these measures is that they were called for by considerations of international import foreign to the 'Iraq. There can be no question that sooner or later a Nationalist party with inflated ambitions must have sprung to light; as a result of recent proceedings it has come sooner to birth.'<sup>2</sup>

The 'considerations of international import' continued to affect Mesopotamia profoundly. The Sharifians not only went on with their propaganda but passed to more forcible action. In November 1919, one Ramadan al-Shallash, an officer who had deserted from the Ottoman Army and joined the Sharifians during the War, arrived in Dair al-Zor on the frontier between Syria and Mesopotamia 'sent by *al-'Ahd* at the head of a small force, with a promise that he should become the governor of the Euphrates and the Khabur area.'<sup>3</sup> At the end of the War, Dair had

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comprised some 50,000 Jews and some 6,000 Christians. The Jewish community in the city of Baghdad is a very important section of the community, outnumbering the Sunnis or Shi'ahs.'

<sup>1</sup> *Review*, pp. 127-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 336.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Basir, p. 123, who adds that this person, while in the Sharifian Army, was accused of 'fomenting a conspiracy against the Iraqi officers' and exiled to Mecca from whence he returned to Syria at the end of the war.

been occupied by the British forces; but the Sharifian government in Damascus claimed it as part of Syria. Ramadan now arrived and incited the tribesmen to attack the British Assistant Political Officer, who was made prisoner.<sup>1</sup> 'Though this act of aggression,' Meinertzhagen informed Curzon on January 13, 1920, 'took place probably without Faisal's knowledge [Faisal was then in Paris], there is little doubt that Emir Zeid under the influence of Yasin Pasha was fully cognizant of the intentions of the expedition even if he did not issue direct orders for the attack on Dair-al-Zor. But no proof of the guilt of the Arab administration', Meinertzhagen concluded, 'has as yet been obtained.'<sup>2</sup> When the British protested at Ramadan's proceedings, the Sharifians disowned their man and sent a delegation to order him to cease his activities and release the prisoner. 'The Acting Civil Commissioner [Wilson] happened to be in Albu Kamal [to the south east of Dair] when Lieutenant Tawfiq arrived there, and was informed by him that Ramadhan al-Shallash had disclaimed allegiance to the Arab Government. Lieutenant Tawfiq begged the British administration to eject him, but in reply was told that we had never desired to hold Deir except to maintain order, and that as Ramadhan had produced the existing state of anarchy it was the duty of the Arab government to right matters.'<sup>3</sup> The quarrel was, for the time being, composed, the prisoner was released, and Ramadan replaced by a veteran Sharifian, Maulud Mukhlis. But the motives which had led to the dispatch of Ramadan al-Shallash to Dair were still present, and Ramadan's successor was only to perfect Ramadan's tactics. A meeting of the Aleppo branch of the *'Ahd* in January 1920 decided to prepare for a revolt in Mesopotamia, and ordered that a party of officers be trained for the task, that 100 volunteers be recruited from Sharifian troops of Mesopotamian origin, and 'that an attempt be made to send at least one gun, in view of the great effect it would have on the tribes'. Two guns were stolen from British forces stationed near Aleppo.<sup>4</sup> Funds were raised: according to al-Askari, Zaid, Faisal's brother, gave £5,000, and 'hundreds of pounds' were collected from members of the society. A decree was published prohibiting the export of gold from the country and imposing a fine of twenty per cent. of the value of contraband gold; from this source £14,000 were raised.<sup>5</sup> In Dair, the *Review* records, 'Maulud was as actively engaged in hostile propaganda as his predecessor. His letters reached the Shaikhs as far down

<sup>1</sup> *Review*, pp. 133-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents I: IV*, p. 614.

<sup>3</sup> *Review*, p. 136. 'On the other hand,' says al-Basir, p. 121, 'Rauf Bey [the other Sharifian delegate] secretly encouraged Ramadan al-Shallash to persist in his actions.'

<sup>4</sup> Al-Askari, II, pp. 48-9.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Askari, II, p. 56.

as 'Amara (in southern Mesopotamia) and he appeared to be amply supplied with funds, which he distributed among such tribal leaders as he thought capable of creating disturbance within our sphere. Our forbearance strained the loyalty of our own supporters, who were unable to understand why the British Government did not deal summarily with an enemy as insignificant as Maulud and his handful of marauders.<sup>1</sup> Dair remained an outpost of anti-British action. When the Sharifian régime collapsed in Damascus the officers in Dair proclaimed the formation of an independent Government of Jazira and Raqqa, and continued so far as they were able to harass British communications in Mesopotamia.<sup>2</sup> The force which the Aleppo branch of the 'Ahd had raised was used for raiding parties across the border. There were in Dair some thirty to forty officers and 250 men available for these operations.<sup>3</sup> In the spring of 1920, Jamil al-Midfai arrived in Dair to concert the activities of the 'Ahd in Mesopotamia and he set out on a foray of his own. At the beginning of June, he put himself at the head of a small force and marched to Tal Afar, an outpost to the west of Mosul. Tahsin al-Askari had procured for him from the Damascus authorities 150 rifles and 50 cases of ammunition.<sup>4</sup> On the way, al-Midfai collected 300 tribesmen, and then attacked the post, the inhabitants of which joined him. The British personnel, two officers and two sergeants, together with sixteen occupants of two armoured cars which had come from Mosul to the rescue, were all killed.<sup>5</sup> Al-Midfai's lieutenant abandoned the town to the tribesmen to loot.<sup>6</sup> Later, these, fearful of the prospect of English reprisals, turned on him and tried to kill him; he fled.<sup>7</sup> In 1921, after the pacification of Mesopotamia, Sir Percy Cox, who had returned as High Commissioner, proclaimed a general amnesty; from it were excluded those who were 'believed to be responsible for the commitment or abetment of certain heinous crimes and are at the present time fugitive from justice.' Among those in this category were 'Jamil Bey and Hamid Effendi Dibuni charged with being the immediate instigators of the murder of the late Captain Barlow, Lieutenant Stuart and other British officials at Tal Afar.' Al-Midfai was then, however, in the employ of Amir Abdullah in Transjordan as district governor and as Director-

<sup>1</sup> *Review*, pp. 137-8.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Askari, II, p. 167. The government had as President a beduin chief, Hajim Pasha, and among the ministers were Tahsin Ali and Bakr Sidqi.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Basir, I, pp. 125-6.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Askari, II, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> *Loyalties II*, pp. 273-4.

<sup>6</sup> The horse of one of the English officers was offered for sale in the bazaar of Damascus shortly afterwards. See D. McCallum, 'The French in Syria, 1919-1924', *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, vol. XII, part I, 1925, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Askari, II, pp. 75-6.



General of Police. Two years later, after the intercession of both Abdullah and Faisal, he was reprieved, and came to Iraq where he was appointed Mutasarrif of al-Muntafik.<sup>1</sup>

The activities of the Sharifians in Mesopotamia could not fail to unsettle the country. The unsettlement increased as a result of English military policy. A new Commander-in-Chief was appointed to Mesopotamia early in 1920. He reached Baghdad in March with new instructions from the Secretary of State for War. 'A few days before my departure to the East', writes Sir Aylmer Haldane, '... I was bidden to report myself to the War Office, where Mr. Churchill harangued me for twenty minutes on the necessity for making drastic reductions in the garrison of Mesopotamia, the cost of which, he said, was becoming intolerable to the British taxpayers.'<sup>2</sup> 'I cannot help feeling,' said the Marquess of Crewe in a debate in the House of Lords in June 1920, 'that in undertaking the responsibility for the whole of this vast area [Mesopotamia] we are doing too much. After all, the time is passed when the people of this country will be prepared to play the fairy godmother to all undeveloped parts of the world, and to hold themselves responsible for introducing a higher standard of administration in uncivilised countries. We simply cannot afford it.'<sup>3</sup> Crewe was expressing in extreme terms the attitude which led to Haldane's instructions. The Government in London were being pressed to make economies, and thought necessary to give in to the pressure. In this way, a matter of domestic politics influenced vitally the events in Mesopotamia. The new Commander-in-Chief was, of course, anxious to carry out his instructions and this preoccupation, together with an optimistic view of the situation,<sup>4</sup> led him to under-estimate the unsettlement of the country, and to neglect necessary measures. 'The progressive drawing-in of our frontier on the Euphrates, and the attacks on Tel' Afar and the Mosul road,' says Wilson, 'gave substance to the belief that our military position was not such as would enable us to hold the tribes if they could be roused'; and he adds elsewhere: 'the belief that we were evacuating the country sedulously spread by nationalist emissaries, grew in the minds of tribesmen to a certainty.'<sup>5</sup> Nothing was done by the Commander-in-Chief to undermine this certainty.

<sup>1</sup> *Iraq, Colonial Office Report, October 1920-March 1922*, pp. 124-5; al-Basir, p. 134; statement by al-Midfai' in *al-Sha'b*, Baghdad, May 2, 1953.

<sup>2</sup> Aylmer Haldane, *A Soldier's Saga*, 1948, p. 371.

<sup>3</sup> H. L. Deb. 5S., vol. XL, col. 890.

<sup>4</sup> Haldane, p. 375; *Loyalties II*, pp. 275-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Loyalties II*, pp. 254 and 283. A note of June 3, 1920, by Miss Bell, in *Wilson's Correspondence* at the British Museum, on a conversation with Hasan Suhail, a

The Sharifians, however active in subverting the country from their base in Syria, were little likely to succeed if they could not carry with them the leaders of the majority in Mesopotamia. This majority consisted of Shi'as, tribesmen and inhabitants of the Shi'a holy cities of Karbala and Najaf. The relations between Shi'as and Sunnis were unfriendly. For the past four centuries there had been constant strife between the Ottomans representing the Sunni power, and the Persians who were the only Shi'a state; consequently, there was a gulf of suspicion between the Sunni ruler and the Shi'a subject in the Ottoman Empire. If the Sunni Sharifians of Damascus were to gain their end in Mesopotamia, they had to secure the support of the Shi'a divines and the tribal leaders. In this they succeeded. They no doubt represented themselves as enlightened liberals free from religious fanaticism, anxious for the welfare of Islam as a whole, and for the freedom of all Muslims from Christian domination. This line of argument would appeal to the Shi'a divines touched as they were by the teachings of the influential Jamal al-Din al-Aghani, himself a Shi'a, who had preached a Sunni-Shi'a reunion for the sake of the political regeneration of Islam.<sup>1</sup> There was perhaps another factor which helped to make possible a momentary alliance between Shi'as and Sunnis. When the prospect of independence appeared, the Shi'a leaders hoped to be the masters of the country, and agreed to ally themselves to the Sunnis who, as a minority, the Shi'as must have calculated, would never have the upper hand in an independent Mesopotamian state. The Sunnis, no doubt, reasoned on similar lines. Wilson recounts a secret meeting he had with three Sunni nationalists in Baghdad in June 1920, in an attempt to dissuade them from violent courses. 'I reminded them that only the Mandate stood between them and the resumption by Turkey of her former position in Iraq. This shot went home, but one of the three remarked that the Turks were after all Muslims and were prepared . . . to give Iraq autonomy. I mentioned the Kurdish minority, and the powerful Shi'a elements on the Euphrates . . .; they replied that both groups were ignorant peasants who could easily be kept in their place, the former by the mutual jealousies of their leaders, the latter by the same agency and through the priesthood, who, they said, were at one with the Nationalist party.'<sup>2</sup> Relations seem to have been established between the Sharifians

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tribal chief, strikingly records the state of mind of the nationalist notables, who were persuaded that the British were leaving Mesopotamia, and that troubles would hasten their departure.

<sup>1</sup> On Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, see C. C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, 1933, chapter I.

<sup>2</sup> *Loyalties II*, pp. 268-9.

and the Shi'a leaders early after the War. Evidence of this is a letter of July 1, 1919, from Ja'far al-Askari, then Governor of Aleppo, to the Karbala divine, Muhammad Taqi al-Shirazi. In this letter, Ja'far al-Askari informs al-Shirazi that a commission was expected to visit Mesopotamia shortly to discover the opinions of the inhabitants,<sup>1</sup> and goes on to tell him what replies should be made to the questions of the commissioners, and what demands to put forward.<sup>2</sup> Communication between the Sharifians and the Shi'as was well established. Not only did Sharifian agents visit the Shi'as, they themselves sent an emissary to the King of the Hijaz.<sup>3</sup> Officers were sent from Syria to help the tribes with their technical knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Funds were also transmitted, it seems, but on this question a controversy rages; Sunni writers maintain that the Sharifians sent some £100,000 from Syria to the Euphrates.<sup>5</sup> In a conversation of July 1920 which Sayyid Talib reported to the British authorities, Yusuf al-Suwaïdi, a prominent nationalist from Baghdad, professed himself dissatisfied with the Sharifians in Syria, because they had sent only £16,000.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Shi'a writers anxious to deny the Sunnis any credit in the rising, and to establish their claim as the sole begetters of the Iraq state, vehemently refuse to admit that any financial help was received, though, says al-Fir'aun, it was learnt after the foundation of the state, that Faisal sent 'with some persons' £26,000 gold to the Euphrates leaders but 'not one farthing reached Ayatallah [al-Shirazi] or any of the leaders of the revolt.'<sup>7</sup> The understanding between the Shi'as and the Sunnis was, however, momentary, and was threatened all the time by dissensions and disagreements. A secret society, *Haras al-Istiqlal*, rival to the 'Ahd, was formed in Baghdad in February 1919; like the 'Ahd its aim was political independence; but it was Shi'ite, and a quarrel with the 'Ahd ensued. Al-Midfai and a companion visited Baghdad, patched up the quarrel and amalgamated the two societies; but after his departure, quarrels broke out afresh.<sup>8</sup> In the middle of the tribal rising on the Euphrates, in August 1920, the Sharifian outpost of Dair al-Zor asked for financial help from the Shi'a leaders. One of these, Muhsin abu Tabikh, refused, and said, 'I have no confidence in the loyalty of the men of Dair al-Zor; they are the vestiges

<sup>1</sup> There was then a prospect of the King-Crane Commission visiting the country. It did not; but its report nonetheless included a section on the supposed wishes of Mesopotamia.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Askari, II, pp. 33-5.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Fir'aun, vol. I, part I, pp. 298-9. The Shi'a emissary was Muhammad Rida al-Shabibi.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Askari, II, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> Amin Sa'id, vol. II, part II, p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> Note by Miss Bell in *Wilson's Correspondence* at the British Museum.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Fir'aun, vol. I, part I, p. 282 n.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Basir, vol. I, pp. 137 and 145; Al-Askari, II, p. 40.

and remains of the Ottomans and their servants.'<sup>1</sup> This mistrust was not an idiosyncrasy on the part of the speaker, as subsequent events were to show.

All these manœuvres and agitations would still not have accomplished anything but for one feature of the country. The region between Baghdad and Basra is populated by semi-settled tribes which had never come under the regular control of government; they were lawless and easily tempted into violence and rebellion. Now, at the end of the War they were well armed: 'British and Turkish rifles', writes Wilson, 'had been picked up on the fields of battle or stolen on the lines of communication in thousands; ammunition had been accumulated on a scale hitherto undreamt of. In the quest for arms the Arab showed qualities of courage, cunning, and perseverance which, if turned to a better cause would have insured success in any walk of life.'<sup>2</sup> At the end of the Euphrates disturbances in 1920, 63,046 rifles and 2,904,513 rounds of ammunition were collected by the British Army from the tribesmen.<sup>3</sup> The War not only meant a great influx of arms to the Middle Euphrates, it also decreased whatever authority government had in the area. The agitations of the Sharifians, which seemed to go unchecked, perhaps also of Mustafa Kamal's agents, and the exhortations of the religious leaders, kept up a state of disaffection in the tribes. They were encouraged by the apparent inability of the authorities to stop the incursions from Syria, and by their hesitant policies. It seemed to need only a little effort to overthrow this government of Christians which pretended to organise, as no other government had, the regular collection of revenue, and which showed such a disquieting propensity to control and administer. As the summer of 1920 approached, the conditions seemed propitious for a decisive blow. The Commander-in-Chief and his staff were in summer quarters in the Persian hills, and the garrisons were unprepared for trouble. They were scattered over 150,000 square miles of country, and their lines of communication were long and difficult. In June the tribes rose. Posts in the Middle Euphrates were overwhelmed, political officers killed and communications cut. It took the military three months to concentrate troops in the area and establish once more the authority of orderly government. After their sudden ebullience, the tribes could not keep up a sustained effort, and the chief centre from which they had been encouraged and incited was no more, for the French had evicted the Sharifians from Syria. The disturbance had been confined

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Fir'aun*, vol. I, part I, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> *Loyalties I*, p. 259.

<sup>3</sup> Despatch by General Haldane, *Third Supplement to the London Gazette*, July 1, 1921, p. 5349.

practically to the middle Euphrates, where it was neither the first nor the last tribal rising, and by the close of the year the region was pacified.

Towards the end of the Euphrates operations in October 1920, Wilson left Mesopotamia, handing over the civil administration back to Sir Percy Cox. He had wished to leave Mesopotamia the previous March, as he did not approve of the trend of policy which he thought he discerned in London, but had agreed to carry on until Cox should be free to leave Tehran.<sup>1</sup> Between March and October had occurred the tribal rising. This rising would in itself have been of as little significance as the numerous other risings with which all governments in Mesopotamia have had to contend. But just as agitation and encouragement from the outside had largely brought about the disturbance, so now agitation outside Mesopotamia succeeded in magnifying its extent and significance. Colonel Lawrence had long been trying to get the Government to hand over the administration of Mesopotamia to the Sharifians. Now in a newspaper campaign, he proclaimed the disturbance a sign of the profound discontent of the people of Mesopotamia with Wilson's administration and a manifestation of their repressed national consciousness. The French, he said in an article of August 8, 1920, in *The Observer*, have been merely following the tyrannical ways of the British; 'it would show a lack of humour if we reproved them for a battle near Damascus, and the blotting out of the Syrian essay in self-government, while we were fighting battles near Baghdad, and trying to render the Mesopotamians incapable of self-government, by smashing every head that raised itself among them.' He was less restrained a few days later writing in *The Sunday Times*: 'The people of England have been led in Mesopotamia into a trap from which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honour. They have been tricked into it by a steady withholding of information. . . . Things have been far worse than we have been told, our administration more bloody and inefficient than the public knows. . . .

'Our government is worse than the old Turkish system. They kept fourteen thousand local conscripts embodied, and killed a yearly average of two hundred Arabs in maintaining peace. We keep ninety thousand men, with aeroplanes, armoured cars, gunboats and armoured trains. We killed about ten thousand Arabs in this rising this summer. We cannot hope to maintain such an average: it is a poor country, sparsely peopled: but Abd el Hamid would applaud his masters, if he saw us working. . . .

' . . . How long will we permit millions of pounds, thousands of Imperial troops, and tens of thousands of Arabs to be sacrificed on behalf of

<sup>1</sup> Wilson to Secretary of State for India, March 19, 1920, *Wilson Papers*.

a form of colonial administration which can benefit nobody but its administrators!'<sup>1</sup> In Parliament, Lawrence's friends together with the Liberal and the Labour benches held forth in the same vein. In a debate of June 1920, in the House of Commons, Asquith laid it down that 'Whatever may be its [Mesopotamia's] possibilities of resurrection, reconstruction or revitalisation, it is certainly not a duty which is incumbent upon us to take upon our already overburdened shoulders.' 'The point, above all others' which Ormsby-Gore desired to make was 'that the continued maintenance of a large force of Indian troops in Mesopotamia is the main cause of the political difficulties in that country today. It is notorious—indeed,' he affirmed, 'it is historic—that the Arab and the Indian do not get on well together . . . you have in Mesopotamia some extremely good military material. . . . Many of the best men in the Arab forces of the Emir Feisal today are Mesopotamians, and a great deal of trouble in Mesopotamia will come if you do not provide an outlet for the martial energies of men of this sort.' The policy he advocated was not as negative as Asquith's; he held it 'our moral duty to create an Arab civilisation and an Arab state' in Mesopotamia; for this to come about, one thing was necessary: Anglo-Indian ideals of efficient administration should be abandoned and the inhabitants left to their own devices; 'then we shall see once more springing up from the soil of Mesopotamia a civilisation which will attract all the best elements in Arabia, and we shall once more bring forward that civilisation which Baghdad possessed before the Turks came there and which made it a centre of culture, wealth and political development to a degree which was remarkable in the history even of Eastern countries.' Aubrey Herbert asserted that England had given its word to set up 'an Arab Parliament in Baghdad' and pressed the government to redeem its word. Sir John Rees, formerly of the Indian Civil Service, spoke of 'the extreme danger of imposing anything like western administration upon the Arabs. The Turkish collection of taxes', he informed the House, 'was extraordinarily agreeable in its character to the dwellers in Mesopotamia. They did not come out except now and again in a kind of sporting state, in which they had a drive and drove the people whom they wanted to tax; when they had got them under their hands they taxed them, and when they did not come they were not taxed. That is infinitely agreeable to nomads.'<sup>2</sup>

This atmosphere was unfriendly to the ideas for which Wilson stood.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, pp. 311-17. See also an interview by him in *The Daily News*, August 25, 1920, entitled 'What the Arabs Want.'

<sup>2</sup> H. C. Deb. 5S., vol. CXX, col. 2236-2270. Debate of June 23, 1920.

'If I may be permitted to make a personal reference,' he wrote in a despatch of November 1919, 'I beg leave to assure Government that by birth, by training and by temperament, I am in sympathy with a democratic as opposed to a bureaucratic conception of Government, and if I find myself unable to advocate the immediate introduction of a logical scheme of Arab Government into Iraq it is because I believe that the result would be the antithesis of a democratic Government.'<sup>1</sup> In a letter to his mother of September 1920, he described himself as 'a radical young man trying unsuccessfully to introduce radical principles into the wholly unfruitful and stony soil of a savage country where people do not argue but shoot.'<sup>2</sup> The radical principles for which he stood were simple and clear cut. '[To] seek justice and ensue it—to protect minority interests—the fair treatment of which is the best rough test of any civilisation.'<sup>3</sup> He did not believe in setting up in the East independent states on the Western model. 'The masses are little affected by "movements,"' he wrote to his father from Persia in 1908, 'agriculture is the main thing, not trade: people want peace and low taxation. A Constitution will give them neither: they can always rebel or find other means to prevent a tyrannical governor from going too far. Could they do so under a highly organised government of the country by the town-bred clerical and semi-Europeanised classes?'<sup>4</sup> The task of the administration which he took over was, as he saw it, 'to adapt existing institutions to new needs, to attach to ourselves, for the time being such old loyalties as existed among the population. . . . There could be no loyalty as yet to "The State": the Arab inhabitants were asked to transfer their allegiance for the time being to the civil administration because it could protect them from present evils, and could offer them better prospects than they had known.'<sup>5</sup> Towards the end of his tenure of office, he defined the responsibilities which he felt were incumbent on the occupying Power: 'We cannot maintain our position as mandatory', he said, 'by a policy of conciliation of extremists. Having set our hand to the task of regenerating Mesopotamia, we must be prepared to furnish alike men and money and to maintain continuity of control for years to come. We must be prepared, regardless of the League of Nations, to go very slowly with constitutional or democratic institutions, the application of which to Eastern countries has been attempted of late years with such little degree of success.'<sup>6</sup> Any other course he thought dangerous for

<sup>1</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 315.<sup>2</sup> *Wilson Papers*.<sup>3</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 322.<sup>4</sup> *S.W. Persia, A Political Officer's Diary, 1907-1914*, 1943, p. 49.<sup>5</sup> *Loyalties I*, pp. 302-3.<sup>6</sup> Wilson to Secretary of State for India, June 9, 1920, quoted in Young, pp. 216-17.

'the population is so deeply divided by racial and religious cleavages, and the Shiah majority after two hundred years of Sunni domination are so little accustomed to hold high office that any attempt to introduce institutions on the lines desired by the advanced Sunni politicians of Syria would involve the concentration of power in the hands of a few persons whose ambitions and methods would rapidly bring about the collapse of organised government.'<sup>1</sup>

Wilson failed, in the end, to convince the British Government of his views. There were many elements outside his control which diminished the chances of his success, but there were also features in his own policies which contributed towards his failure. One curious misjudgment which he made was to suggest the plebiscite at the end of 1918. The result at the time confirmed the policy he advocated; but later, when propaganda from the outside created a situation which belied the results he had obtained, it was easy for his opponents to cry out that he had used illegitimate means to obtain his results which were, therefore, worthless. 'Self-Determination papers favourable to England were extorted in Mesopotamia in 1919,' proclaimed Lawrence, 'by official pressure, by aeroplane demonstrations, by deportations to India.'<sup>2</sup> Man of action though Wilson was all his life, he was yet too clear-headed, too much aware of the historical stage on which he and his antagonists were performing, to act with undistracted aim and total absorption. His hesitation to deal firmly with the trouble makers of Dair al-Zor had, as the *Review* showed, unfortunate consequences from his point of view; and he showed the same hesitation in dealing with the agitators who were bringing the country to boiling point. He himself recognised this later: 'I underestimated', he wrote, 'the influence of the Nationalists; and the susceptibility to their propaganda and that of the dissident *ulama* of the mass of the people on the middle Euphrates. I knew that we were on the eve of initiating an indigenous Government. I was most reluctant to imprison or deport members of a group some of whom would almost certainly, within a few months, be called upon to assist in the task of forming a Government.'<sup>3</sup> Wilson was also too vividly conscious of the distant consequences of policies, and of the principles on which they are based, for the comfort of politicians from whom he had to take his instructions. In April 1919, he advocated the formation once more of a Turkish empire: 'The Turkish Empire cannot now be destroyed: it is the embodiment of the Muslim ideal of temporal rule on earth of Muslim rulers which the inability of

<sup>1</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, pp. 315-16.



Christian powers to agree has aroused, at a moment when Western peoples are exhausted and averse from further wars. The only solution I can now see is the recognition of a Turkish Empire from Constantinople to the Caucasus. . . . This will commit us to support Turkey—and to this extent will be satisfactory to our Muslim clients.<sup>1</sup> However correct the analysis behind such a proposal, the proposal itself was not one which should have been made to politicians living in the political climate of London and Paris in 1919. It would merely gain its author the reputation of a wild man. Again, in June 1920, having indicated what in his opinion the right policy was, he went on to say: 'If His Majesty's Government regard such a policy as impracticable or beyond our strength (as well they may) I submit that they would do better to face the alternative, formidable and, from the local point of view, terrible as it is, and evacuate Mesopotamia.' This was honest and just, but hardly wise; for it only served to give Young, his opponent in the Foreign Office, a convenient handle with which to attack him. 'This telegram', says Young, 'which I regarded as tantamount to a resignation, and thought should be accepted as such, was discussed by the Inter-Departmental Conference on the 16th June. It was to me unthinkable that we should evacuate Mesopotamia within two months of having accepted the Mandate. . . . Lord Curzon took the same view. . . . Lord Curzon's own opinion was that we should continue to hold the middle course of retaining our position in the country with the goodwill of the people, and this was agreed.'<sup>2</sup> This was the most soothing solution, and a man who could not see the virtues of 'the middle course' was obviously tiresome. But whatever mistakes Wilson made, they could not have appreciably influenced the outcome in Mesopotamia. The odds against him were too heavy, his opponents too numerous, his views too unfashionable, for his policy to have stood great chances of securing the support of the British Government. On October 28, 1920, he handed over the last of his responsibilities to his successor. 'It was', he says, 'the feast of St Simon and St Jude, who perished in Mesopotamia and Persia, and were revered by our forefathers as the patrons of Lost and Hopeless Causes.'<sup>3</sup>

## II

Wilson had said, Govern or Evacuate; but these blunt alternatives did not please reasonable men. A way could surely be found of managing neither to govern nor to evacuate. Sir Percy Cox was summoned from

<sup>1</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> Young, p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> *Loyalties II*, pp. 321-2.

Tehran to London and the dilemma was put to him. He pronounced it capable of solution; an arrangement could be reached by which the British neither governed nor yet abandoned the country. 'As to whether the alternative policy of establishing forthwith a national Government had a reasonable chance of success,' he says, recounting the talks in London in the summer of 1920, 'I replied that without being too confident, I thought it had, and that the risk was at any rate worth taking if regarded as the only alternative to evacuation.'<sup>1</sup> It might be said that Cox was here giving effect to the intentions which were expressed when the Mandate was granted to Great Britain. In June, Wilson, after consulting Cox and the Secretary of State for India had announced that 'H.M.'s Government having been entrusted with the Mandate for Iraq anticipate that the Mandate will constitute Iraq an independent State under the guarantee of the League of Nations and subject to the Mandate of Great Britain,' and that the Mandate 'will contain provisions to facilitate the development of Iraq as a self-governing State until such time as it can stand by itself, when the Mandate will come to an end.'<sup>2</sup> But to these phrases no precise significance had been attached, and they could not have meant, or implied that, in a few months' time, the Sharifians were to rule the land. In the meantime, the rising took place and was represented in London as a manifestation of outraged national instincts which demanded urgent soothing; the more so that their soothing would achieve a desirable economy of resources and men. Cox came to Baghdad prepared to concede what the Sharifians had demanded. Had the satisfaction of the Sharifian demands depended on the tribal rising, these demands would have remained unsatisfied, for the rising was now crushed and the centre from which it had been encouraged was no more. But their satisfaction depended on the advocacy of the Sharifians' friends in London, who, after Wilson's discredit and retirement, were now triumphant. Lawrence and his friends were asking for the formation of a separate department to deal with the Middle East; presumably, they feared imperialist temptations on the part of the India Office, and too great a preoccupation with French and European points of view in the Foreign Office, and would not trust either of these two departments with the Middle Eastern settlement. A new department was formed in the Colonial Office, and it included Lawrence and Young who, when Wilson was administering Mesopotamia, considered 'that the absentee Baghdadis [in Faisal's entourage] . . . really "counted" for more than any one who

<sup>1</sup> Sir P. Cox in Lady Bell, ed., *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, 1927, vol. II, p. 526.

<sup>2</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 263.

was in Baghdad itself at the time.<sup>1</sup> When Cox was still in London, pressure was brought upon him, according to Philby, 'to accept Faisal *ab initio* as the prospective King of an Independent Iraq.'<sup>2</sup> This was not yet to be, but a token of the new state of affairs was the appointment of Ja'far al-'Askari, the prominent Sharifian, as Minister of Defence in the Council of State which Cox set up after his arrival in Baghdad.

Miss Bell and Philby were now Cox's principal supporters in the new policy; other British officials showed disapproval: 'My position . . . was a very solitary one . . .,' Cox wrote, 'but whatever the primary feelings of many of my comrades may have, indeed must have been, most of them gradually came round to the view that as an alternative to the bag and baggage policy the new experiment was worth trying and was not necessarily doomed to failure.'<sup>3</sup> Those who could not be convinced left the country. Philby had been a Political Officer in Mesopotamia, and Assistant to Sir Percy Cox in Baghdad in 1917. He had approved of the declaration of November 8, 1918, as 'an admirable statement of liberal policy'.<sup>4</sup> While Wilson was in Mesopotamia he 'didn't like the look of things at all', and he felt 'powerless to influence developments, as the India Office was backing Wilson's Imperialism in Iraq.'<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere in his autobiography, Philby speaks of Wilson's 'increasingly dictatorial régime'. When Cox replaced Wilson he 'cordially accepted [Philby's] offer to help with the new dispensation'.<sup>6</sup>

The case of Miss Bell is different. She had a knowledge of the Middle East extending over many years before the War. For the greater part of the War she was in Basra and Baghdad as a political officer on Cox's staff. Until 1919 she held emphatic views on the irrelevance of nationalist dogmas in the Middle East. 'There is, so far as I can see, no organised body of liberal opinion in Turkey,' she wrote in a book published in 1907, 'but merely individual discontents, founded on personal misfortunes.'<sup>7</sup> 'Of what value', she asked, 'are the Pan-Arabic associations and inflammatory leaflets that they issue from foreign printing presses? The answer is easy: They are worth nothing at all. There is no nation of Arabs; the Syrian merchant is separated by a wider gulf from the Bedouin than he is from the Osmanli, the Syrian country is inhabited by Arabic speaking races all

<sup>1</sup> Young, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> *Arabian Days*, p. 186. In September 1920, the French protested against the possibility of making Faisal ruler of Mesopotamia; his partisans may have thought of this post for him as soon as the French had evicted him from Damascus.

<sup>3</sup> Cox, in Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 528.

<sup>4</sup> *Arabian Days*, p. 173.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184 and 186.

<sup>7</sup> *Syria, The Desert and the Sown* (1907), 1928 edition, p. 267.

eager to be at each other's throats, and only prevented from fulfilling their natural desires by the rugged half-fed soldier who draws at rare intervals the Sultan's pay.' 'I have lived long enough in Syria', she declared in her preface, 'to realise that his rule is far from being the ideal of administrators and seen enough of the turbulent elements which he keeps more or less in order to know that his post is a difficult one. . . . Being English I am persuaded that we are the people who could best have taken Syria in hand with the prospect of a success greater than that which might be attained by a moderately reasonable Sultan.'<sup>2</sup> The passing years left her views unchanged. She was again in the East after the Young Turk revolution, and she reported her observations in a book of 1911. She passed through Mosul, and described the disturbances which took place there during the revolution and the counter-revolution. She said: 'The town is distracted by the ambitions of powerful Arab families who ruled, until less than a century ago, each over his estate in undisputed sovereignty. These lordlings have witnessed with an antagonism which they are scarcely at the pains to hide, the hand of the Turks tightening slowly over the district; nowhere will the Arab national movement, if it reaches the blossoming point, find a more congenial soil, and nowhere will it be watered by fuller streams of lawless vanity. Cruel and bloody as Ottoman rule has shown itself upon these remote frontiers, it is better than the untrammelled mastery of Arab Beg or Kurdish Agha, and if the half exterminated Christian sects, the persecuted Yezidis, the wretched fellahin of every creed, who sow in terror crops which they may never reap, are to win protection and prosperity, it is to the Turk that they must look.'<sup>3</sup> She was, to judge by the incidents and conversations she reported, sceptical of the effect of the constitution proclaimed by the Young Turks on the fundamental conditions of life in these regions: 'Under the best of circumstances, said one of my informants, constitutional government was not likely to be popular in the province of Iraq. Men of property were all reactionary at heart. They had got together their wealth by force and oppression, their title deeds would not bear critical examination, and they resented the curiosity and the comments of the newly-fledged local press. Nor were the majority of the officials better inclined—how was it possible?'<sup>4</sup> The new state of things was not, it seemed, very different from the old, as this conversation with a Muslim showed: ' "I have heard that all are equal", said I, "and that Christian and Moslems will serve together in the army. What think you?"

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> *Amurath to Amurath*, 1911, p. 247.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161; see also pp. 162-3.

"Without doubt the Christians may serve," he answered, "but they cannot command."<sup>1</sup> The Ottoman Empire, in fact, 'ran not', as she pointed out in an eloquent paper on *The Basis of Government in Turkish Arabia*, written in 1916, 'on the paper ordinances, but on the unwritten laws, unrecorded provisions of government, habits of command and of obedience inherited from a remote past and applicable to an immediate present, which was not so very dissimilar from the past; it was founded not on the power and efficiency of wali and commandant, but on the authority of village headman, tribal sheikh and local sayid. . . . The power of sheikh or headman was derived neither from the sultan nor yet from the Constitution nor can it fall within them. It is deeply rooted in the daily life of the people, and with wise supervision, will form for several generations to come the staple of law and order. Indeed,' she insisted, 'it should form the groundwork of all government until the time when developed facilities of communications and a wider circle of enlightenment shall lead by a natural growth to such measure of centralisation as is profitable.' She proposed a policy consonant with this analysis of the situation. 'Whether that which we have to teach them will add to the sum of their happiness, or whether the learning of inevitable lessons will bring the proverbial attribute of wisdom, the schooling must, if it is to be valuable, be long and slow. If our own history from the Moot Court through Magna Carta to the Imperial Parliament was the work of centuries, yet the first contained the germ of all that came after. The tribes of Iraq have advanced but little beyond the Moot Court, and should the shaping of their destinies become our care in the future, we shall be wise to eschew any experiments tending to rush them into highly specialised institutions—a policy which could commend itself only to those who are never wearied by words that signify nothing.'<sup>2</sup> In December 1918, Miss Bell was writing to her father in the same strain: 'About Arab rule. In Mesopotamia, they want us and no one else, because they know we'll govern in accordance with the custom of the country. They realise that an Arab Amir is impossible because, though they like the idea in theory, in practice they could never agree to the individual.'<sup>3</sup> She also indicated officially then that she agreed with Wilson's policy and proposals.<sup>4</sup>

But sometime during 1919, for reasons by no means clear, her ideas underwent a revolution. She concluded her report on *Syria in October*

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *The Arab of Mesopotamia*, Basra, 1917, pp. 11-12 and 21. The paper was originally written for *The Arab Bulletin*. It was later reprinted in a collection of wartime papers by Gertrude Bell, *The Arab War*, 1940.

<sup>3</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 464.

<sup>4</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 109n.1.

1919, which described the disorder and mismanagement of Sharifian rule, with the contention that a situation such as that obtaining in Syria was a historical necessity to which the British in Mesopotamia had likewise to surrender. 'When we set up civil administration in this country,' she wrote, 'the fact that a responsible native Government existed for a year in Syria will not be forgotten by Mesopotamian nationalists; and if we seek to make use of those Iraqis who have done best in Syria they will claim great liberty of action, and they will expect to be treated as equals. . . . Local conditions, the vast potential wealth of the country, the tribal character of its rural population, the lack of material from which to draw official personnel will make the problem harder to solve here than elsewhere. I venture to think that the answer to such objections is that any alternative line of action will create problems the solution of which we are learning to be harder still.'<sup>1</sup> Her argument amounted to this, that because Sharifian rule has been set up by English action in Syria, Sharifian rule had to be set up by English action in Mesopotamia. When, in December 1921, the correspondent of *The Times* in Tehran instructed by Philby, who had come to disagree with her, pointed out the divergence between her earlier and later views, the burden of her vehement defence was still the acceptance of historical necessity: there were 'new forces' which 'under the intensive cultivation of a war fought in the interests of national liberty, . . . assumed very remarkable proportions';<sup>2</sup> therefore, presumably, these forces had to be fortified still more. To a correspondent in Palestine she expressed directly and concisely her new creed: 'I wouldn't for worlds be on that secretariat [in Jerusalem], for however hard may be our task in Mesopotamia, at least we are floating down whatever current there is, the stream of nationalist sentiment, which is after all the only visible movement. Whereas you, it seems to me, are bound to have it against you. And the Sharifian policy which we have adopted will not make things easier for you. . . . I don't doubt that once we've set up our Arab government in Mesopotamia sooner or later the French are doomed. They can no more stand against our nationalism than our military government in Mesopotamia could stand against the nationalism of Syria under Faisal.'<sup>3</sup> In her later phase, Miss Bell could describe the government of Eastern countries in metaphors taken from the nursery: 'An advisory

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Young, pp. 301-2.

<sup>2</sup> Letter in *The Times*, February 11, 1922; the letter was written in answer to three articles of December 27, 28 and 29, 1921, from the Tehran correspondent of *The Times* under the title 'Mesopotamian Mystery,' for the history of these articles, see *Arabian Days*, pp. 206 and 221.

<sup>3</sup> H. Bowman, *Middle East Window*, 1942, p. 286.

position', she wrote in an article in *The Round Table* in 1924, 'is no easy task. It calls for a constant exercise of tact, forbearance, and self-denial, to say nothing of a capacity for realising that infant states will insist on running before they can walk, and that every adage to the contrary notwithstanding, they must within limits of safety be allowed to do so. The eager advance may entail many a tumble and many an unostentatious resetting of tottering feet.'<sup>1</sup> Politics, then, was not the exercise of power by men over other men, it was a technique like learning to walk, and presumably as devoid of moral significance, unless it be held that excellence in walking is morally good: 'What I hope Sir Percy will do is to give a very wide responsibility to natives of this country. It is the only way of teaching them how hard the task of government is. . . . I should stand by and let them do it for a bit and then see if a better adjustment is not possible.'<sup>2</sup> The Sharifian officers to whom Mesopotamia was delivered were like a tender plant: 'We are encouraging the living thing to grow and we feel it pulsing in our hands. We can direct it, to a great extent, but we can't prevent it growing upwards.'<sup>3</sup> Idealism and the memory of ancient glories entitled men to the exercise of power: 'I feel convinced,' she wrote from Baghdad on November 15, 1920, 'that our best allies are the Mesopotamians who served with Faisal and have the true spirit of Arab nationalism in them, and I am therefore very anxious for their return. We have already got Jaafar Pasha—we want more of his kind. There is no denying that they will be regarded with considerable jealousy here, but they are capable men and they are men with an ideal.'<sup>4</sup> When Faisal was installed as King of Iraq she took him on a historical expedition outside Baghdad: 'The Ctesiphon expedition was an immense success. . . . After we had reconstructed the palace and seen Khosroes sitting in it, I took him into the high windows to the south, when we could see the Tigris, and told him the story of the Arab conquest as Tabari records it, the fording of the river and the rest of the magnificent tale. It was the tale of his own people. You can imagine what it was like reciting it to him. I don't know which of us was the more thrilled. . . . I sometimes think I must be in a dream.'<sup>5</sup> Holding these views, Miss Bell necessarily disagreed with Wilson, under whom she was serving. At the time when agitation was at its height in Mesopotamia she wrote: 'I think we're on the edge of a pretty considerable Arab nationalist demonstration with which I am a

<sup>1</sup> 'Great Britain and Iraq: An Experiment in Anglo-Asiatic Relations,' *The Round Table*, 1924, p. 68. The article is unsigned; but for evidence of her authorship, see Bell, *Letters*, II, 673, letter of October 13, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, pp. 499-500.

<sup>4</sup> Bowman, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 619.

<sup>5</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 616.

good deal in sympathy. It will, however, force our hand and we shall have to see whether it will leave us with enough hold to carry on here."<sup>1</sup> According to Philby, Wilson had demanded her recall 'on the ground of her mischief-making on the spot';<sup>2</sup> and it was only on Cox's return that she assumed once more her confidential position in the Mesopotamian administration: 'Sir Percy called me up at once and we talked over some telegrams,' she wrote in October 1920, 'I trying to conceal the fact that it was a wholly novel experience to be taken into confidence on matters of importance.'<sup>3</sup>

The Government in London, Sir Percy Cox, and his assistants were, then, determined to steer a middle course. This meant that they would attempt to safeguard British interests in Mesopotamia with little financial and military commitment, by satisfying what they took to be national aspirations. The question remained who represented these aspirations most worthily. Here, Philby diverged from his colleagues. He had a candidate of his own, a magnate from Basra, Sayyid Talib. 'He was quite obviously', Philby writes in his autobiography, 'the outstanding man in Iraq, in intellect and strength of character, but he was quite unscrupulous, and for that he was feared by all and hated by most. If his good qualities could be utilised and brought fully into play, I saw him in the rôle of director of the destinies of an independent Iraq for years to come in whatever capacity might prove to be most appropriate—Prime Minister for instance or President of the Republic.'<sup>4</sup> Sayyid Talib's past was notorious. 'He had', in Wilson's words, 'a "magnetic personality"—i.e., he was known to be ready to kill those in his way and to pay handsomely those who helped him.'<sup>5</sup> In Abdul Hamid's time he was a power in Basra and a client of Abul-Huda al-Sayyadi, the Sultan's influential astrologer; a lawyer in Basra who took cases brought by litigants against the Sayyid and his family, was wounded by the Sayyid's bravos, and when the lawyer refused to be intimidated, he was murdered in the street in broad daylight. The Sayyid was, thereupon, made Mutasarrif of Hasa, and then a Councillor of State in Constantinople, where he remained until Abdul Hamid's downfall. He then came back to Basra and had himself elected member of the Ottoman Parliament. He dabbled in conspiracies with the Arab officers in Constantinople and was back in Basra in 1914. A new vali was appointed to the province who, Sayyid Talib feared, had instructions to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 486.

<sup>2</sup> *Arabian Days*, p. 185. A letter from Wilson, in his *Correspondence at the British Museum*, dated December 22, 1919, shows that towards the end of 1919 he was in disagreement with her views.

<sup>3</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 563.

<sup>4</sup> *Arabian Days*, p. 189.

<sup>5</sup> Graves, *Life of Cox*, p. 269.



do away with him. He had the new vali murdered. The Ottoman Government found it advisable to come to terms with him, and he remained a power in Basra until the outbreak of War.<sup>1</sup> This man Philby now chose to run as the future ruler of Iraq. Cox had appointed Sayyid Talib Minister of the Interior, with Philby as his adviser; Philby was thus in a position to train his willing candidate. It may well be that Mesopotamia would have fallen to Sayyid Talib had another candidate not had stronger backers. And, after all, his ambition was not absurd, for was he not a power in the land, and further, did he not exert his influence in town and countryside, in the difficult summer of 1920, on behalf of the Administration, and was he not therefore entitled to expect some measure, at least, of gratitude from the Imperial Government? But under the influence of Colonel Lawrence and his friends in London, and of Miss Bell in Baghdad, the British authorities were 'leaning strongly', as Mr Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, put it, to 'the Sherifian solution'.<sup>2</sup> When rumours began to spread in Baghdad that Faisal was the chosen one, Sayyid Talib made, while drunk, some incautious remarks before some guests of his, to the effect that he was ready to oppose the choice of Faisal with force. One of these guests brought Sayyid Talib's words to Miss Bell, who informed Cox, who took this opportunity to arrest and deport the Sayyid.<sup>3</sup> 'It was not to be expected', wrote the Tehran correspondent of *The Times* under Philby's inspiration, 'that after the fate of Sayyid Talib any Sheikh would be such a fool as to say "No" to this demand [i.e., to accept Faisal as King].'<sup>4</sup>

There was little doubt from the time of Cox's arrival in Baghdad that Faisal would, in fact, be chosen. Cox, it is true, knew that the tribal rising of the summer of 1920 had been instigated from the outside.<sup>5</sup> He had been opposed during and after the War to Sharifian claims and pretensions. In 1917, Cox, according to his biographer, 'had warned Cairo that the Iraqis whether Shiah or Sunnis, took little interest' in the doings of the Sharif; he had subsequently reported 'that they were annoyed by the Sherif's assumption of the style of "King of the Arabs"—when they did not deride it—and that they refused to admit the claims that this new title seemed to assert.'<sup>6</sup> In March and April 1918, Cox had visited Cairo and London. In Cairo, he informed a meeting at which Clayton, Hogarth and

<sup>1</sup> Al-Basir, pp. 38-48.

<sup>2</sup> H. C. Deb. 5S., vol. CXLIII, col. 276, June 14, 1921.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Cox*, pp. 288-92, and *Arabian Days*, pp. 197-9.

<sup>4</sup> *The Times*, December 29, 1921.

<sup>5</sup> Letter by Cox to the Bishop of Singapore, September 7, 1920. *Wilson Papers*.

<sup>6</sup> *Life of Cox*, p. 221.

Cornwallis were present, that there might be 'some form of Arab facade to the Administration, but it was essential that there should be complete British financial and administrative control'.<sup>1</sup> In London, Cox presented a memorandum for the War Cabinet, the gist of which was 'that the people of Iraq and their neighbours were not concerned at present with abstract theories of government. . . . Most Iraqis,' he continued, according to his biographer, 'were politically inarticulate, and all they would care about would be their treatment by the Government of Baghdad. . . .' Cox, his biographer adds, 'was not then in favour of a Sharifian Prince, and he seems to have recorded his objection to the use of Baghdad and Basra, where the Sherif of Mecca had neither influence nor prestige, as pawns in the negotiations conducted with him in 1915.'<sup>2</sup> If an Arab ruler was at all to be appointed, he would have preferred the Naqib of Baghdad.<sup>3</sup> But when he came back to Baghdad in October 1920, Cox had already undertaken to carry out a policy of the middle course. He may have thought his previous ideas antiquated, and not in keeping with the march of historical necessity. Once his original policy was abandoned, it was a matter of indifference who the ruler of Iraq should be. Faisal had partisans both in Baghdad and in London. They had created for him a reputation for statesmanship and moderation, and spread the impression that the French had used him hardly, and that he had claims on the gratitude of England. 'Prince Faisal,' Lord Winterton declared in the House of Commons in July 1920, 'is the John Redmond of 1915. He is a moderate Nationalist, anxious to come to terms, and in his country are hundreds of Arab Sinn Feiners who say "Away with this man, and let us have people who will have nothing to do with the French or the British."'<sup>4</sup> This reputation of Faisal's was so widespread that even Wilson proposed, as a last minute remedy for the troubles of 1920, to call him to Mesopotamia after the French had evicted him from Syria, and offer him the rule of the country.<sup>5</sup> In Baghdad Miss Bell was working for Faisal: 'I've been feeling a good deal lately how much the Arabs who are our friends want us to give them a lead. They constantly come to me,' she wrote in December 1920, 'not only for advice on immediate conduct but in order to ask about the future. I feel quite clear in my own mind that there is only one workable solution, a son of the Sharif and for choice Faisal: very very much the first choice.'<sup>6</sup> 'There was a rumour—that on the way down to Basra when

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 242-3.

<sup>3</sup> Telegram from Cox in London to Wilson, dated May 16, 1918, in *Wilson's Correspondence* at the British Museum.

<sup>4</sup> H. C. Deb. 5S., vol. CXXXII, col. 157.

<sup>5</sup> *Loyalties II*, pp. 305-6.

<sup>6</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 581.

we went away [to Cairo in March 1921],’ she wrote in another letter of April 1921, ‘I had said to persons not named that the object of the conference was to declare Faisal King . . . it was entirely untrue, but no doubt he[?] knows that formerly when people pressed me to give my opinion I have always said that Faisal would, I thought, be the best choice. I am therefore identified as a Sharifian . . . but I have always been careful to say that the choice must rest with the people.’<sup>1</sup> In London, Lawrence and his friends were the triumphant party. They worked so well that, as early as December 17, 1920, Faisal was offered the throne of Mesopotamia.<sup>2</sup> When, therefore, Cox came to Cairo in March 1921, to a Conference on the Middle East over which Churchill presided, he was quite ready to accept a candidate commanding so many suffrages. He even went further, carried away by the logic of the new policy; for, if the new policy was that England should safeguard her interests by satisfying the ambitions of the Sharifians, then why trouble to operate a Mandate? ‘Sir Percy has urged’, Miss Bell wrote on May 5, 1921, ‘that we should drop the mandate altogether and go for a treaty with the Arab State when it is completed.’<sup>3</sup> This was to happen a few years later.

The conference at Cairo in March 1921 assembled merely to settle the procedure by which to implement decisions already reached. ‘Everything staged before they went out for Cairo conference’, Liddell Hart noted after a talk with Lawrence in August 1933, ‘T. E. had settled not only questions the Conference would consider, but decisions they would reach. “Talk of leaving things to the man on the spot—we left nothing.” Had them printed and wanted to distribute (!) but W. S. C. objected.’<sup>4</sup> ‘We have no intention’, declared Churchill in the House of Commons on June 14, 1921, ‘of forcing upon the people of Iraq a ruler who is not of their choice. At the same time, as the Mandatory Power, as the Power which is put to such heavy expense, we cannot remain indifferent or unconcerned in a matter so vital to us. We should like to have the best candidate chosen, but we must in any case have a suitable candidate chosen. . . . It seems to me, looking at it as a layman, that it is not altogether unlike what happens at a by-election, where several candidates present themselves . . . , and seek the nomination of the various associations; and where those associations, while exercising of course, an absolutely independent judgment, are nevertheless often anxious, and rightly anxious, to know what are the news of Parliament street and Whitehall, and, after all, are not wholly insensible to the advice that is tendered to

<sup>1</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 590.

<sup>2</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 593.

<sup>3</sup> Ireland, p. 309.

<sup>4</sup> Liddell Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

them.' After informing the House that he had obtained the best experts 'that the British Empire can produce in these matters', and proclaiming his hope that 'around the ancient capital of Baghdad' there will rise 'an Arab State which can revive and embody the old culture and glories of the Arab race', he indicated that the agents he found most suitable to this end were 'the house and family and following of the Sherif of Mecca'.<sup>1</sup> In Baghdad Miss Bell jubilantly wrote: 'The success of the last two and a half months has been beyond all belief. There are times when I rub my eyes and think it's too good to be true. The extremists have vanished or changed into intimate acquaintances; we have retained our old friends and have [made] new.'<sup>2</sup> Now, with an Arab government, the first, as she rejoiced to point out, since the Abbasids, she was coming, she announced, into her own.<sup>3</sup>

The installation of Faisal was staged carefully. Care was taken to make it seem as though his coming followed overwhelming demand inside the country. Such was not the case. In February 1919, the Naqib of Baghdad had said to Miss Bell: 'As regards the government of Mesopotamia, my detestation of the present Turkish administration is known to you, but I would rather a thousand times have the Turks back in Iraq, than see the Sharif or his sons installed there.'<sup>4</sup> From what followed on the decision to make Faisal ruler of Mesopotamia, it would seem that the Naqib had faithfully mirrored the feelings of the country, and that the situation had, in the meantime, changed but little. The British Army had put down the rising, and British power was respected and feared in the country. The irritant from Syria had disappeared, and there was widespread readiness to follow the lead of the civil administration. 'To sum up my impression of the week,' Miss Bell was writing in December 1920, 'I feel more and more how anxious the people are here with whom we are dealing to work in with us and follow our advice. On big matters and on little matters they are always dropping in to my office to consult me as to Sir Percy's views. So and so is suggested as Mutasarrif of Hillah—will that be all right? Yes, I say firmly, that's all right. My interlocutor breathes a sigh of relief and goes off to vote for him.'<sup>5</sup> In June 1921 her impression was the same: 'What everybody wants to know is our wishes and as soon as they get any kind of lead, they will, I think, come into line.'<sup>6</sup> And yet, in spite of the known wishes of Cox and Miss Bell, opposition to Faisal could not be repressed: 'Shortly before Faisal reached Iraq,' writes Cox's biographer,

<sup>1</sup> H. C. Deb. 5S., vol. CXLIII, cols. 272-77.

<sup>2</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, pp. 572 and 623.

<sup>3</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 580.

<sup>4</sup> Bowman, p. 186.

<sup>5</sup> *Loyalties II*, p. 340.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 598.

'Cox had saved Faisal's partisans, and the Provisional Government as well, from an awkward situation by his attitude towards a strong delegation from Basra who brought a petition requesting separate treatment for Basra Province. They would accept a common King, but they asked that their province might have a separate Legislature and Army, and raise and spend its own taxes. . . . Cox gave them a sympathetic hearing but told them that the British Government wanted to see a united Iraq.'<sup>1</sup> The Kurds stood aloof. Churchill, while introducing Faisal's candidature in the House of Commons had said: 'The Kurd of course does not appreciate the prospect of being ruled by an Arab Government. . . . [The Kurds] have expressed considerable apprehension at the idea of an Arab Government, . . . We have therefore instituted inquiries throughout the Kurdish areas, and the result has been to confirm the view that the people of southern Kurdistan would only accept union with Iraq if they were dealt with by the High Commissioner direct.'<sup>2</sup> But the case of the Shi'a tribes of the middle Euphrates is the most curious. It was their rising which had occasioned Faisal's coming to Iraq. Now however that Faisal was coming to them, they showed not the least desire to welcome him. The plan of their leaders had misfired. These had thought to oust the English with the help of the Sharifians and themselves rule the country, leaving a pittance of power to the Sunnis for their timely complicity. They had risen, they had been put down, the English were still there, but against all the rules of the game, the English were bringing the Sunni Sharifians, whose guilt in the rising was not less, to rule over them. Under these conditions they were not disposed to welcome Faisal. They had discovered their mistake shortly after the arrival of Cox. 'Jafar also described his efforts', wrote Miss Bell on November 1, 1920, 'to get into touch with the holy element in Kadhimain [the Shi'a holy city adjoining Baghdad]. He had been to the great people and tried to prove to them that the sole object of the Provisional Council summoned by the Naqib was to lay the foundations of National Institutions. But they would reply only that they wanted a government elected by the people, and that nothing else was of any use. . . . They offered no suggestion and remained obdurately hostile.'<sup>3</sup> Not without reason, for the Council of State organised by Cox 'contains', Miss Bell remarked in another letter, of November 7, 'considerably less Shiah than Sunnis';<sup>4</sup> Miss Bell indicated the consequences: 'the present Government which is predominantly Sunni, isn't doing anything to conciliate the Shiah. They are now considering a number of administrative

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Cox*, p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 572.

<sup>3</sup> H. C. Deb. 5S., vol. CXLIII, col. 281.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 573.

appointments for the provinces; almost all the names they put up are Sunnis, even for the holy Shiah province of the Euphrates, with the exception of Karbala and Nejd [*sic*, Najaf is meant] where even they haven't the face to propose Sunnis. . . .

' . . . They must make up their minds that they can't have it both ways. If they want popular native institutions, the Shiahs who are in a large majority, must take their share. There are a number of leading Shiahs on the Euphrates who would prefer British administration (which they can't have) to an Arab Sunni administration or a Turkish Sunni!'<sup>1</sup> A week after Faisal reached Basra, on June 30, Miss Bell wrote: 'We get reports about the Lower Euphrates tribes preparing monstrous petitions in favour of a republic and of Shiah Alim Mujtahids being all against Faisal. I don't believe half of them are true, but they keep one in anxiety.'<sup>2</sup> As Faisal advanced from Basra to Baghdad through the Shi'a area, their hostility became manifest. 'At Ur junction,' writes Ireland, 'the gathering from Nasiriya had been small and cold. At Samawa, a large number of shaikhs and tribesmen had turned out and in Diwaniyya the audience had been fair, but there had been little enthusiasm. At Karbala, the Indian *Qaimmaqam*, who had little faith in Arab self-government, had left the town the day before Faisal's arrival, without indicating the official attitude towards the Amir. After an interview with the High Commissioner, however, he had returned to Karbala and attempted to make suitable preparations, but there had been no spontaneity and the Ulama stood markedly aloof. At Najaf, the Ulama had been reserved, if not hostile. At Tuwairiji [*sic*] and at Hilla, however, Faisal had been more cordially received.'<sup>3</sup> Philby, then in charge of the Ministry of the Interior, had travelled down from Baghdad to Basra, a few days before Faisal's arrival. At every station on the way he, as a responsible official from Baghdad, had been asked what were the orders for Faisal's reception. 'To all I replied "There are no official orders. You must decide on your own course. Faisal is coming as a candidate for your throne, not as King. . . . You have read Churchill's speech and know what he would like, but the British Government will not interfere with the freedom of your vote."<sup>4</sup> The middle Euphrates, guided by Philby's language, manifested its feelings, thinking to incur thereby no official displeasure. The situation made Faisal anxious. On arrival at Baghdad, he complained to Cox. 'Colonel Joyce and I', Miss Bell wrote describing his arrival, 'stayed talking to Mr. Cornwallis [who

<sup>1</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 585, Letter of January 22, 1921.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 607.

<sup>3</sup> Ireland, p. 328.

<sup>4</sup> *Arabian Days*, pp. 201-2.

accompanied Faisal] who, poor dear, was so dried up with thirst that he could scarcely talk at all. But what he said was that up to now things hadn't gone well. The people were standing back. . . .

'All the way up the story they had heard was, the High Commissioner is neutral, the Khatun and Mr. Garbett want Faisal and Mr. Philby wants a republic. . . . Naturally Faisal was bewildered—was the High Commissioner with him and if so why did his officers adopt a different attitude? All the more was he bewildered because he was told with equal frequency that if the local officers would lift a finger all the people would follow their lead. Why wasn't the finger lifted if that was the official policy?'<sup>1</sup> Philby resigned, and the opposition of the Middle Euphrates effected nothing, for now there was no Sharifian Syria to encourage and help, and Miss Bell was bringing in 'the overwhelming argument that Sir Percy and Faisal are working hand in hand.' 'It's really remarkable,' she marvelled, 'how completely satisfied they are if they know that Sir Percy approves.'<sup>2</sup> A plebiscite was organised and ninety-six per cent. of the population, it was announced, voted for Faisal.<sup>3</sup>

Wilson's administration had been accused of governing by force and not by consent, and of swimming against the current. The accusers were now in control, and the result of their operations was a rule which could never have been set up without the exertion of British power, and the influence of British prestige. Like Wilson's rule, it was not based on consent. But Miss Bell came to recognise that 'no Government in this country whether ours or an Arab administration, can carry on without force behind it. The Arab Government has no force till its army is organised, therefore it can't exist unless we lend it troops. . . . Mesopotamia is not a civilised state, it is largely composed of wild tribes who do not wish to shoulder the burden and expense of citizenship.'<sup>4</sup> English force used by Wilson was condemned as tyrannical excess; English force used on behalf of Faisal's rule was praised in the interest of order and security: 'Until the middle of February [1921], when they were withdrawn from the whole area [of the middle Euphrates], says a Colonial Office report, 'troops were engaged in enforcing terms of surrender. The tribes were heavily armed; to have left the Arab Government in its initial stages to deal with the problem they presented would have been to prejudice its success in

<sup>1</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, pp. 605-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 608.

<sup>3</sup> Ireland, pp. 332-4. This writer observes, p. 334, n. 3: 'It is difficult to understand how this figure was obtained. The population of Kirkuk [a Kurdish district voting against Faisal], . . . forms approximately six per cent. of the population of Iraq, exclusive of Sulaimaniyya [another Kurdish district which abstained].'

<sup>4</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 578.

the maintenance of administration.<sup>1</sup> Force, then, used in such a cause, was force used wisely, since an Arab Government was in tune with the spirit of the times, and was dictated by historical necessity. But a justification by historical necessity always suffers from a fatal ambiguity. A course of action is first said to be necessary for the fulfilment of an immutable and transcendental law, and then it insensibly becomes necessary because whoever is justifying it has the will and the power to enforce compliance with his own beliefs. 'I don't for a moment hesitate about the rightness of our policy. We can't continue direct British control,' affirmed Miss Bell in June 1921, 'though the country would be better governed by it, but it's rather a comic position to be telling people over and over again that whether they like it or not they must have Arab not British government.'<sup>2</sup> 'Whether they like it or not': such was to be the outcome, an outcome worthy of the ironic Goddess of History.

One result of the 1921 settlement is worth noting: the discomfiture of the Shi'as introduced anti-British sentiment as a fundamental principle of Iraqi politics. In the independent Kingdom, the Shi'as would claim to be the only genuine patriots, whose rising had enabled the Sunni followers of Faisal to attain power; whereupon these Sunnis, the Shi'as would claim, by unworthy compromises with the hated British imperialists managed to enjoy all the fruits of office.<sup>3</sup> The Sunni politicians who ruled could not afford to leave such an accusation unanswered; as a result, they had to vie with the Shi'as in anti-British declarations. The situation therefore arose of the governing classes of a state created, fostered and protected by England, virulently attacking the English as exploiters and imperialists. Such a situation is obviously not to be explained by the English occupation of the country—an occupation lasting a mere four years of disturbed war and post-war conditions, an occupation, moreover, without which the rulers of Iraq would have had no country to rule. Such a situation is

<sup>1</sup> *Report on Iraq Administration*, October 1920–March 1922, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Bell, *Letters*, II, p. 598.

<sup>3</sup> L. Jovelet, writing in 1933, gives the following distribution of high government offices between Sunnis and Shi'as:

	Sunni	Shi'a
Ministers .. .. .	6	1
Directors-General .. .. .	14	0
Mutasarrifs .. .. .	13	1
Judges .. .. .	33	9
Qaim-maqams .. .. .	43	4
Police officers .. .. .	54	4

L. Jovelet, 'L'Evolution Sociale et Politique des "Pays Arabes," 1930-33,' *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1933, p. 511.



a direct result not of the British occupation of the country, but of the British withdrawal from it. The 1921 settlement had another result: it justified and sanctioned violent and arbitrary proceedings and built them into the structure of Iraqi politics. The men who came with Faisal believed that their success was due to the use of violence and that they had triumphed over the British, and compelled them to change their policy, by the use of violence. It was a lesson that would sustain them both in their relations with the British and in their conduct of public affairs. Now they were masters of a country the population of which was heterogeneous in the extreme, with ignorance, distrust and dislike the only bonds between the different classes, religions and races. All these disparate groups were now to be ruled by successful men of violence, between whom and any of these groups disagreement would be solved by arbitrary and violent action. The 1921 settlement left no machinery by which differences between ruler and subject, or between group and group could be composed with peace and moderation; it organised a central government, able to use all the modern techniques of administration, and handed it over to these men to use as they liked; authority was drained from all localities and communities and concentrated in them; a group at odds with them would either be crushed wholly and finally or, if it could, would uphold its cause by the sword.

With the establishment of Faisal in Mesopotamia, then, the principles on which the Sykes-Picot Agreement had been built disappeared completely. The Agreement was, no doubt, a convenience for imperial Powers, and the ends and means of Powers bear very little looking into; but what redeems their operations and invests them with a measure of grace is the acknowledged responsibility to see that order, security and legality obtain in the countries where their sway is exercised. The virtue of the Sykes-Picot Agreement was that in it such a responsibility was acknowledged. But it was acknowledged only to be denied; and English statesmen allowed themselves to believe that to satisfy the lust for power of discontented and ambitious men was virtuous and excellent. English domination in the Middle East meant both an opportunity and a responsibility. That the opportunity was missed, and the responsibility shirked is perhaps not surprising, since whatever happiness or peace or security men enjoy seems the result more of providential good fortune than of prudent exertion.

## SOURCES

FOR the convenience of the reader, there follows a list of the sources used in this book and mentioned in the footnotes. The list contains bibliographical details only, and is not meant to indicate the varying worth and credibility of the evidence taken from these sources. The use made of them in the course of the book will have given a fair indication of the standing, the usefulness, and the importance of each of them.

A word is perhaps necessary concerning the Arabic literature. This consists, in great part, of chronicles or memoirs in which documents, sometimes not available from European sources, are copiously reproduced, and in which minute details concerning the intricacies of Arab nationalist politics are set down in artless profusion. A book exceptional in its artistry and in its eye for effect is the diary of the last days of Faisal's government in Damascus, which Sati' al-Husri, the Syrian ideologue of Arab nationalism, published in 1948. The sources which have proved the most useful are, Amin Sa'id's three-volume work dealing with events from 1914 to 1925 in the Hijaz, Mesopotamia and Syria, and Muhammad Tahir al-Umari's book based on the papers of his kinsman Muhammad Sharif al-Faruqi, who was, for some time during the War, Husain's agent in Cairo. These two books are of basic importance. Tahsin al-Askari's memoirs have provided useful details with which to supplement Amin Sa'id's account of Sharifian rule in Syria; also, Muhammad Kurd Ali's last volume of his history of Syria. Most of the important books used here are written by Sunni Arab nationalists, more or less involved in the events they describe, and it is easy to take into account the inevitable apologetic tendency of their work. It is not only easy but important as well to do so when dealing with events in Mesopotamia in the period 1919-21, and to compare, for instance the approach of the Sunni Amin Sa'id with that of the Shi'ite Fariq al-Muzhir al-Fir'aun.

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*The Yale Papers* are drawn from the National Central Archives, Washington, and from the Yale University Library. They consist of the reports and correspondence of William Yale, Special Agent of the United States State Department in the Near East, 1917-19.

*The Milner Papers* at New College, Oxford, contain some material relating mainly to the last stages of the War in Palestine and Syria.

*The Wilson Papers* at the London Library consist in great part of the family letters of Sir Arnold Wilson. Some official and private correspondence of Sir Arnold Wilson is also preserved in the Department of Printed Books at the British Museum. The greater part of it is under two headings:

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*Syria in October 1919* is a report written by Miss Gertrude Bell in November 1919 from which I have cited extracts. A copy of the report may now be seen in the Department of Printed Books at the British Museum, catalogued under the author's name.

*The Arab Bulletin* is a collection of confidential reports extending from 1915 to 1919. I have referred to it for some details, as well as reproduced from it certain contributions by D. G. Hogarth.

The Manuscript of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. I have compared the text of the Manuscript with the published version. No direct quotation from the Manuscript is allowed, and I have felt precluded from using evidence yielded by this comparison. I have however referred to the Manuscript for one small chronological point.

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## APPENDIX I

'Arabs and Turks,' by D. G. Hogarth. (*The Arab Bulletin*, No. 48, April 21, 1917.)

THE policy of the Allies, declared, and presumably immutable, is to remove the Turks, as a governing people, from all regions in which the Arab-speaking races are more numerous. We are committed to expel from that area the element which has been effectively dominant in South-West Asia, with very brief interruptions, for nearly a thousand years, since the first appearance of the Seljuks in Iraq. Indeed, if we take account of the long subservience of the Abbassid Caliphs to their prætorians, we must date Turkish control of Arabs back into the eighth century. This domination, however, with its implications, is not all that is threatened. The Turks have supplied to Sunni Islam the only enduring political force which it has known—its single steadying influence. Never changing their dynasty, and responsible for no religious schism, the Osmanlis have kept the Sunnites together, with their heads in one unchanged direction, for the last four centuries. Of their predecessors of the same race, the Seljuks, Sir Mark Sykes has put it well in his *Caliph's Last Heritage* that they 'have laid the foundations of all that is virile and enduring in modern Islam.'

It is not suggested hereby that our policy is wrong or should be revised. Circumstances not under our control have determined it. But after we have destroyed—or even while we are destroying—we have to construct, and we shall be in the better position if we have realised the faults as well as the merits of those we are about to set up, and the virtues as well as the vices of those we are setting down.

When we look back over the history of the early Caliphates—and we must so do, since the present hopes and pretensions of the Arabs, and the popular belief in their coming Renaissance rest equally on ancient history—we find the period of genuine Arab Empire extraordinarily short. Arabs governed Arabs, through Arabs on an imperial scale for much less than a century. It is just the Omayyad Caliphate—the Damascus period and no more. The short previous Meccan period was all conquest and raiding accompanied by no more organisation of territories overrun than

would secure their payment of tribute. The long Baghdad period which was to follow would not be government of Arabs by Arabs. If the Abbassids were Meccan, their ministers, great and often small, were Iranians or Turanians, and their trust was in mercenaries, at first Persian, then Turk, Circassian, Kurd—any race but the Arabian. They themselves, even when Baghdad was filled with Semites, were patently anti-Arab and obscurely Shiah, though later they would parade conformity to the Sunna, which Baghdad itself had laid down, and if Abbassid rule in Iraq will not satisfy our formula, neither will it nor will that of the Omayyads satisfy it in Egypt, North Africa, Spain or Iran. For there the subjects were non-Arab, and soon many Governors would not be Arabs either, but Turks like the Tulunids of Egypt, or Berbers like the dynasties which were to detach the Mediterranean shores of Africa from the distant inland Caliphate, which knew nothing about the sea.

Sir Mark Sykes appreciated more justly the character of the Abbassid Caliphate than the reason of its coming to be, when he wrote that it grew out of an 'undefined wish to replace a government centred in an Arabian oligarchy in Damascus by a cosmopolitan Caliphate representative of the other peoples who had been swept into the folds of the mantle of the Prophet.' The compelling cause was rather the force of economic gravity in the great plain-land of South-West Asia. Its centre shifted as inevitably from Damascus to Iraq as it had shifted from Mecca to Damascus. Lean Hejaz could keep it less than a generation: richer but not opulent Syria grappled it for two, but, once released, it could only swing round to rest where the immemorial seat of Empire has been, whenever Empire has lodged in Western Asia. Should Empire be there again, the centre of gravity will swing round the same arc. Mecca will not keep it, nor can Damascus long; its swing may be more slow, since Iraq is not now what it was before Hulagu ruined its canals; but eventually it must gravitate to the old point of rest, and Semitic Empire will cease as before to be purely Arab or purely Semitic, or anything more pure than West Asian. There are Arabs who know this tradition and hope of the Hashimite Caliphate of Baghdad was doubtless in the mind of the Emir of Mecca when he claimed the style and title of Hashimite King.

The brevity of purely Arab Empire was determined less by the force of non-Arab elements than by the inability of Arabs themselves to develop any system of imperial administration more adequate than the Patriarchal. They made no other contribution to the science of government. The Omayyads alike in Syria and Spain seemed to have carried on with the machinery they found, insisting only after a time on expression in Arabic.

The Abbassids owed a better system to non-Arab bureaucrats. No Arab Caliph ever conceived anything so effective and stable as the Household machine which Suleiman, first Ottoman Caliph, perfected on the model of the imperial system of ancient Rome.

This is the dark side of the medal. There is a bright side. If the Arab could not conceive or construct an administrative machine, he could use one which another had made, and he could impose and maintain himself in supreme place at great distance from his home and for long ages, supported by surprisingly few men of his own race. Except in the history of the later Roman Empire, there has been nothing like that unquestioning and frank acceptance of one race as born to power, which was conceded to the Arab from Persia to Spain. It was not only that Arabs were installed and treated as God's noblemen, but that all sorts and conditions of men of other races Arabised themselves in name and speech. History tells us that, in fact, Ahmad Ibn Tulun was a Turk and Saladin was a Kurd; but except to the credit of the Turkish or the Kurdish blood, neither fact matters at all. What does matter is that the Tulunids and the Eyubids wished and ultimately believed themselves (as their remote descendants still believe) to be Arabs. Though some of the earlier leaders, for example Omar, Khalid Ibn Walid and Moawiya, not to speak of the Prophet himself, were conspicuously able men, the mass of those Arab aristocrats of the world do not strike us as superior persons. They were imposed on society by a combination of influences—by the prestige of a whirlwind of conquests which made fighting men wish to be Arabs, as Napoleon's deeds once made many wish to be Frenchmen; by the Arabs' valuation of themselves as a Chosen People, and perhaps, most of all, by that desire for a national link with an exclusive God which has made earlier men deify their Kings and later men live and die for a principle of Legitimacy, however ignobly personified by the contemporary claimant of divine right.

Be that as it may, the Arabian has to be ranked among the great assimilating races of history. But so too has the Turkish which has made Osmanlis of more and perhaps better aliens—Albanians, Slavs, Anatolians, Kurds, Circassians—than its rival has induced to be Arabs. Indeed, the Turk has assimilated not a few Semites, while fewer Turks have ever come to regard themselves as Arabs—probably none at all during these last four centuries of the subjection of the one race to the other.

This is by no means all. The Arabian claims rank too among the fighting races of the world; it claims to be of the greater civilising races; and, finally perhaps to be the greatest of all races that have conceived and

propagated a Faith. If the battle-force of the Arab is inconstant, self-conscious and too soon spared or spent, and therefore, has gone down before the steadfast, unsparing drive of the Turk, there is no comparison between the two as exponents and agents of civilisation. The Arabs developed culture both while they fought and when they had done with fighting (as under the later Abbassids) and were paying others to fight for them. As a governing race it might be said of them, as a great historian of antiquity has said of another people—they began to wither when they kept the peace—had their literary, scientific, artistic activities ever been more conspicuous than under those latest Abbassids. Arab civilisation owes a heavy obligation to the Greek, to the Persian, to the Jewish, but not heavier than are debited to all other greater civilisations. Every advanced human culture must be eclectic and its originality is reckoned by the measure in which it transforms and makes its own what it has seized.

So much for ancient history. It shows us on the one hand, the Arab people, capable of most dynamic ideas, and able to impose them swiftly and finally on aliens within a wide radius of its homeland, but, this done, delivered incontinently of new ideas modifying the first and making new disunion; terrible but very brief in war; inapt to conceive, organise, or maintain a system of government more adequate to Imperial purposes than the Patriarchal: of a natural nobility which, under the influence of a religious idea and the military success of its propagation, has been accepted by numerous alien races as superior to their own nobility: receptive, constructive and prolific of the higher civilisation, builders of cities, quick to sink actual resources in great works for future increase of wealth. On the other, the Turkish people, equally terrible in war but more enduring: incapable of conceiving or adopting the higher civilisations, but tenacious of an idea received from without and immutable in practice; able to administer a system of government and to hold by it through good or ill: as full of the will to power as any Arab, but with more effective sense of national unity.

Today we are face to face with these two peoples, still incompatible, although one has been subjected in the main to the other for some four centuries, and once more at open odds; and of the two, we are to help the subjugated race to an enduring freedom throughout its own area.

The shift of the world's balance of power and centre of civilisation, to the West since the sixteenth century, has affected equally both Turks and Arabs, depressing their relative importance to mankind and their pride in themselves. Inevitably both have become more dependent, or one may say (without intending offence), more parasitic. So far as reception and

assimilation of European ideas and practice go their positions remain much the same, Levantinised Syria balancing Levantinised Anatolia and Constantinople. But in the acquisition and use of European material the Turk has had the pull from his geographical position and his political dominance.

Borrowed things, however, affect vitally but a small part of either race—those members only that live or have come into the outer westward fringes and taken on the varnish of the Levant. Behind lie the masses working out their own salvation. It is between the respective masses of the two peoples that the instructive comparison lies. Neither can be said to have made much spiritual progress in these four centuries, and certainly not one more than the other: for the idea of nationalism is equally dormant in both. But the Arab mass has lost most because it had most to lose. One most vital thing has passed from it—the religious prestige of apostolic primacy and consequent empire. The control of Islam has been in the hands of its rivals too long, and the fire of faith has burned everywhere too low, for the spiritual force of the Arabs to be a political force again. To be an Arab, even to be an Alid, is no longer an ambition which possesses men of alien races. Even among Arabs themselves, descendants of the Prophet are become very many and rather cheap, and one Sherif or Seyyid holds himself about as good as another. The best of them derive their status from something more potent and less honourable than the blood of the Qoreish. The ruling house of Mecca owes, in all men's sight, its elevation and present wealth to an Albanian Pasha of Egypt, and its present head to appointment by the Porte. King Husein will have to rely on very much more than his pedigree if he is to be the agent of a new Arab unity.

As well as his apostolic primacy the Arab has lost, not his aptitude for culture, but his distinctive civilisation. Centuries of subjection and the ruin of the apparatus which insured ease and leisure in Iraq, and also in a lesser degree in Syria, have reduced him below even his neighbours. He can show a spirit of humanity superior to the Turkish, but, at the moment, few of its fruits.

The Turk, on the other hand, has suffered no loss equal to the Arab's. While the latter no longer has that which gave him international importance, the former keeps the virtues, lower and few, by which he conquered his rival at the first—his unimaginative tenacity, his disciplined courage, his will to power, and his steadfastness in the pursuit of it. Left to himself, if there were a fair field and no favour, he would undoubtedly continue to govern the Arab as ill as in the past, but to govern and police him



always. It is not from failure of either will or capacity that the Turk must give way; nor, when the roof falls on the Philistines, will it be because his old strength has returned to the Arab.

Once it was said in mockery of a Jew, 'He saved others: Himself He cannot save;' and neither of that Jew nor of Jews in general is the gibe true. Of their Semitic kinsmen, it might have been said so often, not in mockery, that we stand forewarned.

D. G. H.

## APPENDIX II

'Mesopotamia: Baghdad and Moslem Feeling.' (Extract from a note in *The Arab Bulletin*, no. 47, April 11, 1917.)

THE influence of the capture of Baghdad on Moslem minds can hardly be gauged yet by positive evidence. The local effect has varied necessarily with individual commitments and hopes. As Basra telegraphs, under date April 1, the provincial chiefs in Iraq, who had compromised themselves by a friendly attitude towards us, showed sincere relief at an event which renders the return of the Turks highly improbable, if not impossible. Our principal Mesopotamian allies, the sheikhs of Muhammerah and Koweit, have displayed a joy which is obviously genuine, and if their subjects were not particularly enthusiastic it matters little, seeing for how much the ruling individual counts in the East. Nor can the attitude of other chiefs and their subjects, not so committed previously, but now within inevitable reach of our arms—e.g., those on the Euphrates below Fellujeh—be otherwise than openly congratulatory.

It is only when we look outside the sphere of the local operations that the question becomes open. It is interesting, but not in the least unexpected, that the same Basra telegram, summarising reports from Persia and the Gulf, should draw a distinction everywhere between the Shiite attitude and the Sunnite. The Shias are stated to be delighted by the news at Bahrein and Bandar Abbas, and pleased in Arabistan and Southern Persia generally. Merchants foresee renewed and extended facilities for trade; the educated class hopes to enjoy office again in the Shiah Holy Cities; the common folk expect to be able once more to visit the Holy Shrines in life, and to have conveyance to hallowed earth in death. This last consideration, added to the comforting reflection that a Sunnite government, which has always shown itself contemptuous and oppressive towards the Shias, has ceased to sit astride the pilgrim roads, is enough to make the unorthodox section of Islam rejoice at the fall of Baghdad; and, further, it must be remembered that the Shias, though personally among the most fanatical Moslems, have not that sense of, or desire for, unity in Islam, or that deep craving for temporal dominion, which actuates Sunnis. Waiting for the appearance of the twelfth Imam, or detached from

practical politics by transcendentalism, they care little if one great city, more or less, pass under Christian Government, so their religion and its observances remain unhampered.

Not so the Sunnis. Whether they be friends or foes to us at this moment, to them Baghdad in our hands is one more dreary tide-mark of a receding flood. Even King Hussein, hearing the news at Mecca, commented upon it to his notables in a spirit of regretful warning. This was what came of suffering 'Turadians' in a seat of Moslem power! Probably no sincere Sunni in the world has received the news with any feeling more joyful than chastened acquiescence, or more salutary than a conviction that Turks have been backing the wrong horse. In Constantinople, the official revelation of the disaster is reported to have provoked intense despondency and to have been followed by a tumult in the Chamber and a shower of petitions for peace. At Lahej, Ali Said Pasha, like the stout man he evidently is, communicated the news to Arab chiefs, with an exhortation to them to stiffen their backs as sole response. In Egypt, while the censorship weighs heavily on the press, one can learn little about popular sentiment from journalistic comments; but the manner, more than the words, in which, on March 14, a paper of such known Turcophil tendencies as the *Wadi Nil* twitted Enver with the futility of his past pledges and his present explanations in regard to Baghdad, was very significant. Islam is not despaired of, but the Turk is; and pro-British or anti-British, the papers throw the blame on the Germans. When the news of Baghdad arrived, the present writer was in an Egyptian province far from Cairo. It was clear that a wide and profound impression was caused, and hardly less clear that some measure of sadness and disillusion was its immediate consequence.

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